

STRATEGIC EVALUATION OF POLICY INFLUENCE:
What Evaluation Reports Tell Us About Public Policy Influence
by IDRC-Supported Research

Final Report

Prepared for the Evaluation Unit, IDRC

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30 April 2002

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AERC	African Economic Research Consortium
AGOA	African Growth Opportunity Act
AWTS	Africa and the World Trading System (TEC project)
CBCRM	Community-Based Coastal Resources Management
CIES	Peru Consortium for Economic and Social Research
CNPRE	Permanent Commission on Education Reform (of the Coordination of Organizations of the Mayan People of Guatemala)
CNPT	National Permanent Commission on Land (of the Coordination of Organizations of the Mayan People of Guatemala)
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Central Africa
COPART	Mixed Commission of Land (Guatemala)
DESCO	Centro de Estudios y Promocion de Desarrollo
ECA	Eastern and Central Africa region
ECAPAPA	Eastern and Central Africa Programme for Agricultural Policy Analysis
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ENR	Environment and Natural Resources (IDRC thematic area)
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FLACSO	Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences
FMP	Fisheries Management Plan
IADB	Inter-American Development Bank
ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LATN	Latin American Trade Network
MPA	Marine Protected Area
NARI	National Agricultural Research Institute
NARS	National Agricultural Research System
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRM	Natural Resource Management
OAU	Organization of African Unity
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PBR	Peacebuilding and Reconstruction (IDRC program initiative)
PERC	Peru Economic Research Consortium
PoFW	Provincial Office of Forestry and Wildlife
RAFI	Rural Advancement Foundation International
R&D	Research and Development
SEE	Social and Economic Equity (IDRC thematic area)
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
TEC	Trade, Employment and Competitiveness (IDRC program initiative)
TOR	Terms of Reference
TIPS	Trade and Industrial Policy Secretariat (of IDRC)
TRAMIL	Application, Research and Dissemination of the Use of Medicinal Plants in the Caribbean
UNCTAD	UN Conference on Trade and Development
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
WSP	War-Torn Societies Program
WTO	World Trade Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Given the increasing importance of influencing policy in IDRC programming and research, the Centre is currently engaged in a strategic evaluation of the influence of Centre-supported research on public policy. This activity is meant to develop a clearer understanding not only of what we mean by “policy influence” but what IDRC and Centre-supported research has accomplished thus far. This will inform thinking and planning at the project level – how to improve the Centre’s project support to enhance policy influence opportunities and deepen the Centre’s understanding of how ideas enter policy processes; and at the corporate level – what has IDRC done as a corporation and what strategic adjustments does the Centre need to make (Carden et al. 2001).

As part of the strategic evaluation, IDRC’s Evaluation Unit commissioned a review of evaluation reports from Centre-supported research. This study was undertaken to determine what information could be drawn from evaluation reports regarding the experience of IDRC-supported research in influencing public policy in the countries and regions in which the Centre works. The increasing priority given to policy influence in IDRC programming and projects is reflected powerfully in the fact that ninety-four percent of evaluation reports reviewed for this study examine policy influence, in different ways and to varying degrees, as an indicator of project performance. The evaluation reports reviewed tell us a great deal about the intent of IDRC-supported research to influence policy, the approaches and activities used by projects to influence policymakers and policy processes, the extent and ways in which projects have influenced public policy or contributed to policy influence, and the factors that facilitated and/or hindered a project’s policy influence potential.

The majority of evaluation reports demonstrate that influencing public policy is an intended result or implied expectation of IDRC-supported research. According to the evaluation reports reviewed for this study, Centre-supported research looks to strengthen the mechanisms by which research is translated into policy action. Research and knowledge generation was the most common mechanism through which IDRC-supported projects sought to influence public policy, followed closely by dissemination of research outputs to policymakers and other policy-interested stakeholders and capacity building of researchers, policymakers and civil society actors in ways that bear on public policy. Facilitating or improving policy dialogue among policy-interested stakeholders was also an important mechanism to strengthen the linkages between research and policy making and influence policy. These mechanisms were utilized to bridge the gap between research and policy-making and in the long-term, contribute to the development of innovative policy alternatives at various levels. The majority of evaluation reports demonstrate that IDRC-supported research most frequently looks to influence national level policymakers and policy processes, although few projects seek to influence national policies alone. Many of evaluation reports demonstrate that projects seek to influence public policy and policymakers at multiple levels either simultaneously or consecutively (e.g. through scaling-up). These initiatives were found to be overlapping and mutually reinforcing that together constitutes a process of policy influence.

To bring research to bear on public policy, the evaluation reports indicate that IDRC-supported projects draw on a diverse mixture of activities and approaches. The majority of evaluation reports suggested that the production of policy-relevant research and analysis was the principle activity through which projects sought to influence policy. In more than half of the reports reviewed, the participation of government agencies and

individual decision-makers in the project was sought to encourage joint agenda setting and better ensure that research feeds into active policy processes. Dissemination of research results through publications, working papers, newsletters, policy briefs, websites and databases, and government outreach and networking was a common activity in most of the evaluation reports reviewed. Workshops, seminars, conferences, policy roundtables, and other interactive fora were used by IDRC-supported projects as a vehicle for disseminating policy-relevant research results, sharing expertise and experience and facilitating policy dialogue, and building the capacity of researchers and policymakers in ways that bear on public policymaking. Training activities were implemented to strengthen the capacity of researchers to produce policy-relevant research and the capacity of policymakers to absorb and use research results in policy-making. Mentoring and peer review activities were employed to encourage peer learning and strengthen collaborative relationships between researchers and research institutions and between research and policy communities. Ideas were also found to enter the policy arena through activities designed to encourage and strengthen dialogue among policy-interested stakeholders. Dialogue initiatives included working groups and task forces to conduct policy analysis and produce recommendations for policy change, and more informal dialogue mechanisms such as policy roundtables to discuss research findings and generate ideas regarding future policy directions, and networking and consultation to exchange project information with and solicit feedback from policymakers.

Most evaluation reports claim that the project under review had influenced public policy. Among the evaluation reports reviewed for this study, “policy influence” constitutes intermediate influences – influences on policy-interested stakeholders and the processes by which research is translated into policy action rather than the actual development and implementation of new policies (*policy impact*). In many cases policy influence was of the kind anticipated at the outset of a given project, although several evaluation reports documented that unanticipated types of policy influence had emerged over a project’s lifespan – demonstrating the dynamic and unpredictable nature of policy influence. Anticipated influences on public policy included contributions to the advance of policy relevant knowledge, significant increases in the capacities of policy-interested stakeholders (researchers, policymakers, civil society), successful dissemination of research outputs to policymakers, strengthened policy dialogue, and contributions to the development of policy alternatives and proposals. Unanticipated or emerging policy influences documented in the evaluation reports included changes in the attitudes and approaches of policymakers and other policy-relevant stakeholders, the use of research results as inputs into policy development, and researchers advising government and taking on important government positions through which they are playing an active role in policy design. These intermediate influences also demonstrate the potential of IDRC-supported research to realize genuine policy impact in Southern regions over the longer-term.

Evaluation reports also revealed useful information regarding the factors that can facilitate and/or inhibit a project’s policy influence potential. Factors found to facilitate policy influence included the meaningful involvement of government officials and policymakers in the project, the high quality and relevance of research to active policy processes; the visibility, reputation and positioning of researchers and/or institutions in policy arenas, the novelty of the approach or structure used by the project; and the presence of a supportive policy environment. Factors found to inhibit policy influence included poor relevance and usefulness of research outputs to current policy processes,

poorly targeted and structured activities that failed to reach and incorporate policymakers and their ideas into project activities, project delays, resistance of powerful interest groups to policy reforms, a deteriorating or lack of supportive policy environment and/or weak governance structures, and the slow, complex and political nature of policy-making processes. Many of these factors relate to the structure, approach and performance of projects themselves, suggesting that policy influence may be dramatically improved through the sharing of lessons learned. However, the evaluation reports reveal that the ability of a project to influence policy is also shaped by the political, economic and social context, at various levels, in which a project is situated.

The evaluation reports do not however provide a comprehensive picture of the experience of IDRC-supported research in influencing public policy. Evaluation reports have often-severe gaps in information regarding policy influence activities and outcomes and claims of policy influence typically lack corroboration by policymakers and other stakeholders. The lack of detailed discussion and depth of analysis is due in part to the broad nature and focus of many evaluation reports, but may also indicate a lack of clarity and consensus as to what policy influence means in the context of development research; the range of ways in which policy influence may be sought and achieved; and what constitutes policy influence and impact as an outcome of research. IDRC's strategic evaluation of policy influence has the potential to bring greater clarity to these issues through the establishment of conceptual and methodological guidelines for the Centre, its programs, and Centre-supported projects. This can only serve to strengthen the emphasis given to policy influence in project implementation, reporting and evaluation and the ability of IDRC-supported research to influence policy in a meaningful way in developing countries of the South.

**STRATEGIC EVALUATION ON POLICY INFLUENCE:
What Evaluation Reports Tell Us About Public Policy Influence by IDRC-
Supported Research**

1. INTRODUCTION

IDRC is currently engaged in a strategic evaluation of the influence of IDRC-supported research on public policy. As part of this evaluation process, the Evaluation Unit commissioned a review of evaluation reports from Centre-supported research. The purpose of this study was to review a selection of evaluation reports received by the Unit, and analyse and document what they reveal about the degree and the ways in which Centre-supported research has influenced public policy in the countries and regions in which IDRC works. This study is meant to contribute to developing a clearer understanding about what constitutes public policy influence in IDRC's experience.

The report begins with a discussion of the methodology used to analyze IDRC evaluation reports and document findings regarding public policy influence by Centre-supported research. This is followed by a brief discussion of the format and intent of the evaluation reports reviewed as part of this study, in order to establish and explain what IDRC evaluation reports can and cannot tell us about policy influence in IDRC's experience. Sections four through eight highlight the key findings borne from the review of evaluation reports. Section four examines what evaluation reports tell us about the intent of Centre-supported research to influence public policy processes. Section five outlines the activities and approaches utilized by IDRC-supported research to influence public policy in specific ways. Section six explores the kinds of policy influence claimed by evaluation reports. Sections seven and eight document the factors facilitating and inhibiting policy influence according to IDRC evaluation reports reviewed for this study. The report finishes with some concluding remarks regarding the findings brought to bear by the review of evaluation reports regarding the experience of IDRC-supported research in the area of policy influence.

2. METHODOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS

As part of the strategic evaluation on the influence of IDRC-supported research on public policy, the purpose of this study is to review a selection of evaluation reports from IDRC-supported research projects to identify (i) the level of intent of the evaluation to assess, report on, or otherwise capture policy influence; (ii) the intent of IDRC-supported research to influence public public policy; (iii) the range of ways in which IDRC-supported research has made links between research and public policy, are said to have contributed towards policy influence or are likely to influence public policy; and (iv) how, by what means, or using what mechanisms the projects/programs have reportedly influenced or contributed to influencing policy. The study also went beyond this to identify and report on the factors facilitating and inhibiting policy influence based on the information provided in the evaluation reports reviewed.

The Evaluation Unit wished to review a selection of recent evaluation reports received by the Unit. The Unit had originally intended to review the totality of reports submitted to the Unit between January 2000 and January 2002, but due to time constraints and the length of the evaluation reports, it was decided to include only those evaluation reports submitted between January 2001 and January 2002. During this period, the Evaluation Unit received a total of 23 evaluation reports.

Evaluation reports were reviewed for the above-mentioned information related to policy influence in IDRC-supported research projects. Since IDRC evaluation reports do not follow a Centre-established approach or format, each report was reviewed carefully to extract information related to the following questions:

- Is an examination of policy influence a stated objective in the Terms of Reference (TORs) of evaluators? If the TORs are not identified, is an analysis of, or reference to, policy influence included in the body of the evaluation report?
- What were the general and specific objectives of the project being evaluated and do they include reference to influencing policy?
- How did the project under review intend to influence policy (i.e. in what way or through what mechanisms)?
- At what level, or levels, is policy influence targeted (local/municipal, provincial, national, regional, and/or international)?
- What activities did projects utilize to influence policy? What was the objective of such activities and at whom were they targeted?
- How has the project reportedly influenced public policy or contributed toward policy influence (or are said to be likely to influence policy)? What constitutes “policy influence” in the context of the evaluation report?
- What factors were found to facilitate and/or inhibit policy influence in the project’s experience?

The last topic was not a part of the original focus of the study, however a reading of initial evaluation reports indicated that it was extremely relevant to policy influence in the context of IDRC-supported research, and to the objectives of the larger study, and was thus incorporated into the analysis on which this study is based.

Upon reviewing the 23 evaluation reports, it was clear that several did not constitute project or program evaluations and so could not be included in the study without causing

considerable distortion of the data collected and analysis of trends across projects. In total, seven evaluation reports were excluded from the study for this reason; leaving 16 reports on which this study is based (see Annex 1).

The sample evaluation reports are more or less evenly distributed by region: Latin America and the Caribbean (n=5), Africa (n=4), Asia (n=3), and Global/multi-region (n=4). By thematic area, Social and Economic Equity (n=8) and Environment and Natural Resources (n=7) are well represented while Information and Communication Technologies for Development (n=1) is not¹. In terms of their focus on policy, seven of the sixteen evaluation reports cover policy-oriented or policy-focused projects; eight reports cover research projects with a policy component; and one report covers a project with no apparent policy-orientation.

As will be discussed in greater detail in the next section, the evaluation reports vary considerably in their length, depth of analysis and discussion, and focus on policy influence. There was also found to be considerable variability in the language used in evaluation reports to discuss policy influence. Combined, these created some difficulty in analysis of trends across evaluation reports. To better ensure that this report accurately reflects the thrust and content of the evaluation reports reviewed, it draws on and highlights where possible the actual words used by evaluators in their assessments. Explicit examples and quotations are drawn most frequently, although not exclusively, from Social and Economic Equity (SEE) projects. Overall, SEE evaluation reports had a greater policy orientation and focus than reports from the Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) thematic area. SEE evaluations consequently reported on policy influence in greater depth and detail than those from ENR, and are cited more extensively in the report as a result. With only one evaluation report reviewed from the ICTs for Development thematic area, examples from this thematic area not cited as frequently as those from other thematic areas in this report.

This report presents quantitative and qualitative information regarding the level of intent of IDRC-supported research to influence policy; the range of ways in which IDRC-supported research projects have made links between research and public policy, are said to have contributed towards policy influence or are likely to influence public policy; and how, by what means, or using what mechanisms the projects/programs have reported influenced or contributed to influencing policy. Quantitative information is presented in tables throughout the body of the report to demonstrate overall trends among projects related to the above criteria. Qualitatively, the report draws considerably on the concrete examples and actual words used in evaluation reports to explore and convey what policy influence means in the experience of IDRC-supported research.

Before proceeding to the body of the report, the next section provides more detailed information on the evaluation reports reviewed and what they are, and are not, able to tell us about policy influence in the context of IDRC-supported research projects.

¹ No attempt was made to include additional evaluation reports (from outside the January 2001 to January 2002 time period) from the ICTs from Development program to improve its representation vis-à-vis the other thematic areas.

3. Evaluation Reports and Policy Influence

IDRC project documentation can tell us a great deal about the priority given to policy influence in IDRC-supported research. Evaluation reports are a potentially valuable source of information for several reasons. Project evaluations are implemented at key stages in a project's lifecycle – at preliminary and mid-term stages or at the completion of a project or project phase – and as such look to answer critical questions regarding a project's performance in relation to its objectives and other important performance criteria. In many cases these evaluations are used to identify mid-course corrections that might be needed to ensure that a project achieves its intended objectives or to provide lessons learned to other projects supported by IDRC programs. Evaluation reports are also more detailed and analytical in approach compared to other types of project documentation and as such have the potential to examine and report on project performance in greater depth. Lastly, the direction and content of evaluation reports demonstrate the priorities and interests of IDRC Program Initiatives - what are programs looking to evaluate? From an examination of sixteen evaluation reports, it is clear that policy influence, in conjunction with other important performance criteria, is a priority among IDRC programs and projects.

Policy influence was, to varying degrees, addressed in the majority of evaluation reports reviewed for this study. Of the sixteen evaluation reports on which this report is based, ten included an examination of policy influence in the Terms of Reference of the evaluators (or the objectives of the evaluation) and five make reference to policy influence in the body of the evaluation report, making a total of fifteen evaluation reports examining policy influence as an indicator of project performance. The emphasis on policy influence is due to the priority placed on policy influence in IDRC programs and in IDRC-supported projects with an objective to influence policy and policy processes.

The evaluation reports reviewed tell us a great deal about the intent of IDRC-supported research to influence policy, the approaches and activities used by projects to influence policy and policy processes, the extent and way in which projects have influenced public policy or contributed to policy influence, and the factors that facilitated and/or hindered a project's ability to influence policy. Of the thirteen evaluations addressing policy influence, each examined one or more of these aspects of influence in varying degrees of detail.

Evaluation reports are however an imperfect tool for analysing policy influence in IDRC-supported research. A methodological limitation of this study is that policy influence is not the primary focus of evaluation reports. As a result, the depth of analysis and discussion of policy influence was in many cases limited. Several evaluations, for example, provided insufficient elaboration on the activities organized to influence policy-interested stakeholders (policymakers, researchers, civil society actors etc.), the specific intent of such activities, and to what extent these activities achieved the type of influence anticipated. The majority of evaluations also fell short of providing clear evidence of policy influence or impact; presenting instead relatively vague or anecdotal references to influencing policy. However, this is not meant as a criticism of the evaluation reports or of the projects themselves.

Vagueness in reporting on policy influence can be attributed to several factors including the nature and focus of the evaluation reports themselves. The majority of evaluations reviewed for this report (n=11), look to assess the overall performance of an individual or

group of projects to achieve the stated goals outlined in the project proposal and other supporting documentation. Evaluators are therefore mandated to examine a broad range of project objectives, activities and achievements, only one of which usually deals with policy influence. Consequently, the evaluators are not in a position to allocate adequate time and resources to sufficiently capture the range of issues related to policy influence in a given project. Four of the evaluations examine the performance of an IDRC Program Initiative in a specific area of programming through the evaluation of selected PI-funded projects^{2,3}. In such “targeted” assessments, evaluators are mandated to examine particular themes in considerable depth, while only reflecting briefly on issues such as policy influence. As a result, most evaluation reports lack sufficient depth in analysis and reporting on policy influence and this, in turn, limits the extent to which this report can draw meaningful conclusions regarding policy influence in IDRC-supported research.

The extent to which this report can draw reliable, substantiated conclusions about policy influence is also hindered by the apparent lack of feedback and corroboration regarding policy influence by policymakers and other policy-interested stakeholders in the evaluation process. Most evaluation reports draw primarily on insights and feedback provided by researchers involved in the project and, as a result, the reports reflect researchers' perspectives on project performance and its influence on public policy⁴. The evaluation reports reviewed for this study do not appear to have sought out and/or received input from policymakers and other policy-interested stakeholders regarding the influence of research on policymaking in order to substantiate claims made by project's regarding policy influence outcomes.

Vagueness in reporting can also be attributed in part to a lack of clarity and understanding of what “policy influence” means in the context of development research (a conceptual framework); the range of ways in which policy influence may be sought and achieved (a methodological framework); and what constitutes policy influence or impact as an outcome of research (evaluation guidelines or criteria).

IDRC's Strategic Evaluation of Policy Influence has the potential to bring greater clarity to what we mean by policy influence in development research through the establishment of conceptual and methodological guidelines on policy influence for the Centre, its programs, and Centre-supported projects. This can only serve to strengthen the emphasis given to policy influence in project implementation, reporting and evaluation and the ability of IDRC-supported research to influence policy in a meaningful way in developing countries of the South.

The remainder of the report examines the insights brought to bear by the evaluation reports reviewed in terms of the intent of IDRC-supported research to influence public policy, the activities and approaches utilized to achieve the type of influence intended,

² For example, IDRC's Sustainable Use of Biodiversity Program Initiative conducted an evaluation of selected SUB-funded projects to examine how effectively local or indigenous ecological knowledge was incorporated in SUB programming and project implementation.

³ The remaining report is best described as an analytical paper that includes an overall assessment of an IDRC-supported project.

⁴ One notable exception is the War-torn Societies Project (Somalia) evaluation report that draws heavily on the feedback from diverse policy-interested stakeholders (including government actors) to explore the project's influence on public policy in the peacebuilding and reconstruction process.

and the extent and ways in which IDRC-supported research has had an influence on public policy and policy-making processes in developing countries of the South.

4. INTENT TO INFLUENCE POLICY

According to many of the evaluation reports reviewed for this study, influencing public policy is an intended result or implied expectation of research. The intent to influence policy, however, is not solely articulated as the intent to inform or change policies through the production and supply of research results. The evaluation reports suggest that IDRC-supported research seeks to “improve the policy environment” and policy processes at various levels in the South for the purpose of enhancing technology generation and adoption, raising economic growth, and reducing poverty and environmental degradation.

The evaluation reports reviewed for this study suggest that IDRC-supported research looks to influence policy processes at various levels of analysis. The majority of projects covered by the evaluation reports target policy influence initiatives, first and foremost, at national level decision-makers and decision-making structures and processes, although few seek to influence national policies alone. The evaluation reports demonstrate that, among the projects reviewed, policy influence is targeted at multiple levels either simultaneously – for example, seeking to influence national and regional agricultural and economic policymaking through an single initiative⁵ – or consecutively – for example, expecting to first influence NRM policies at local/district levels and looking to scale-up a project’s focus to influence national policymaking later in the project or in a subsequent project phase⁶. Table one illustrates what evaluation reports had to say about the targeting of policy influence by administrative level.

TABLE 1 TARGETING OF POLICY INFLUENCE BY LEVEL

	No. of reports (n=16)
Global (multi-country/inter-regional)	3
Regional	4
National	13
Provincial	3
Local / municipal	5
Not specified / No intent to influence policy	1

To influence public policy at various levels, IDRC projects go beyond the production of policy relevant information to strengthen the process and mechanisms by which research is translated into policy action. Projects seek, for example, to strengthen the capacities of Southern research systems to produce quality, policy relevant research; build the capacities of policymakers to absorb and use research results; and enhance the ability of civil society to participate in policy-making processes. The dissemination of research outputs constitutes a mechanism to ensure that research results are made

⁵ A Report of the Mid-Term Evaluation of The Eastern and Central Africa Programme for Agricultural Policy Analysis (ECAPAPA).

⁶ Community Forest Research Project: Mid-Term Evaluation.

available to policymakers. Through policy dialogue, projects intend to create a space for the exchange of ideas among key policy-interested stakeholders and building understanding and consensus on future policy directions. These constitute mechanisms of policy influence intended to bridge the gap between research and policy-making, and to some extent society and policy-making, in order to improve the policy environment in countries and regions of the South. Through one or more of these mechanisms, IDRC-supported research looks to contribute to the formulation of innovative policy options and alternatives that promote healthier and more prosperous societies, food security, biodiversity, and access to information.

Table two outlines the ways in which projects intend to influence policy according to the evaluation reports reviewed for this study. The remainder of this section will examine each of these areas in turn.

TABLE 2 INTENT TO INFLUENCE POLICY

	No. of reports (n=16)
Research and knowledge generation	13
Strengthen professional capacities of researchers and research institutions to produce high quality, policy relevant research	7
Enhance capacities of decision-makers to absorb and use sound policy research	1
Improve capacity of civil society and organizations to participate in policy processes	4
Dissemination of research outputs to policymakers	10
Facilitate / strengthen policy dialogue between researchers, policymakers, and other stakeholders	6
Contribute to development of innovative policy alternatives	9
No intent to influence policy specified	1

Research and Knowledge Generation

New knowledge and ideas are crucial to the development of innovative policy alternatives. Thirteen of evaluation reports reviewed for this study indicate an intent to influence public policy through the generation of research and new knowledge relevant to solving pressing development problems in the South. In many cases, evaluation reports explicitly articulate the intent to inform public policy and policy processes through the generation of research, while in others, the link between research and policy influence is implied or absent. Among the evaluation reports reviewed, examples of research to inform policy include community-based participatory research to influence forest management policies towards co-governance⁷, studies on security and defence issues in post-conflict situations to inform national public policy debates⁸, research on the usefulness of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for development to

⁷ Hue University of Agriculture and Forestry Community-Based Upland Natural Resource Management Project: Team Self-Evaluation.

⁸ Evaluation Report: For the International Development Research Centre: FLACSO Guatemala Security Projects.

strengthen national education policies and programs⁹, and policy research related to issues of trade, employment and competitiveness to contribute to national and international policy-making processes¹⁰ to name only a few.

Box 1 Research to inform policy processes

TEC projects in Africa have set as one of their main goals the nurturing of policy-making on evidence derived from rigorous research (External Evaluation of IDRC's TEC Program, p.31).

... emphasis was on autonomous, empirically-based research, in areas of policy relevance. (Economic Research Consortium, Peru, p.1)

WSP seeks to use policy research as a tool or vehicle for initiating dialogue and communication among different internal and external actors in order to foster greater transparency in the national policy process about different actors/institutional goals and priorities; to provide a better understanding about the various policy choices and alternatives that are potentially available (War-torn Societies Project Model of Conflict Management, p.7)

It was hoped with research done by FLACSO ... to stimulate a first real public debate on defence and security in Guatemala and assist civil society in proposing options in those fields (FLACSO Guatemala Security Projects, p.7)

The project seeks to provide scientific and local knowledge-based support to the San Felipe community in its attempts to create and manage a MPA [Marine Protected Area] (CBCRM in the Caribbean, p.58)

... to use research findings to influence forest management policies (Community Forestry Research Project, p.17).

... stakeholder interviews revealed very large gaps in local policy-makers' and policy analyst's knowledge of the comparative performance of alternative public investment options or policy changes. ... intermediate results from this policy analysis stage would be the new kinds of evidence (information) brought into regional policy debates, and used in policy-making (Mid-Term Evaluation of ECAPAPA, p.29-31)

The intent to influence policy is articulated in terms of carrying out research that has the potential to inform policymakers and contribute to the formulation of sound policy options. However the production of knowledge is not the only channel through which IDRC-supported research seeks to influence policy processes. Many projects conceptualize policy influence as a process that begins, not ends, with the production of knowledge. For example, IDRC's TEC program sees itself as:

"an investor in knowledge relevant to policy; as an investor in capacities that can better produce this knowledge locally and apply it to policy; and as a disseminator of information that informs decision-making processes in different venues"¹¹.

⁹ Evaluation and Learning System for Acacia (ELSA): Emerging Lessons.

¹⁰ Trade Employment and Competitiveness: Report of an External Evaluation.

¹¹ Trade Employment and Competitiveness: Report of an External Evaluation, p. 10-11.

For research to inform and influence policy, capacity building, dissemination of research outputs and policy dialogue are important mechanisms utilized in IDRC-supported research.

Capacity Building

Evaluation reports emphasize the genuine importance of capacity building to achieving policy influence in developing country environments. Ten of projects reviewed sought to mobilize and strengthen the capacity of various policy-interested stakeholders to develop innovative and sustainable policy-oriented solutions to development problems and introduce and advocate these solutions to policymakers¹². Among the projects reviewed, capacity building included:

- strengthening professional capacities of researchers and the organizational capacities of research institutions for conducting high quality, policy relevant research;
- enhancing the appreciation and capacities of decision-makers to absorb good research;
- improving the capacity of civil society to participate in policy processes.

Strengthening capacity of researchers and research institutions

Evaluation reports demonstrate that IDRC-supported research looks to mobilize and strengthen the capacities of Southern research systems as a vehicle for policy influence. Seven of projects reviewed indicated intent to influence public policy through the strengthening of professional capacities of individual researchers and research institutions to produce high quality, policy relevant research. Weaknesses in individual and institutional capacities to conduct research and to link research to policy processes is often the driving force behind these initiatives:

*“ECAPAPA was created out of the felt weaknesses in existing capacity in NARS for policy analysis, formulation and implementation as indicated by inadequate social science capacity and poor awareness, especially within NARIs about topical policy events that hinder their internalization in research programs; low interaction of agricultural policy analysis units among themselves and with stakeholders and the top-down manner in which policies are devised; and lack of adequate resources for policy research and analysis ...”*¹³

The main focus of both individual and institutional capacity building is strengthening the knowledge and skills of researchers and research centres to produce research that is rigorous, high quality and relevant to active policy processes. In four of the projects reviewed this included expanding the capacities of researchers in newly emerging research and policy fields such as environmental economics¹⁴. Quality and relevance

¹² Many of the other projects reviewed were also involved in capacity building initiatives but did not articulate a clear relationship between capacity building and the intention to influence policy. Such projects are not included in this analysis.

¹³ A Report of the Mid-Term Evaluation of The Eastern and Central Africa Programme for Agricultural Policy Analysis (ECAPAPA), p.9.

¹⁴ Economic Research Consortium, Peru (Phase II): End of Project Report.

are crucial to what one project referred to as research's "capacity to convince"¹⁵, motivate, or influence policymakers.

Box 2 Strengthen professional capacities (researchers and research institutes) for conducting high quality, policy relevant research

The formal objective of the project was to strengthen the ability of Peru to formulate effective economic and social policy ... by strengthening the country's domestic research base, considered to be a key element of a strong civil society. (Economic Research Consortium, Peru, p.1)

To enhance the capacity of the [national] research systems in particular to service the policy interest of the region (Mid-Term Evaluation of ECAPAPA, p.1)

"capacity building ... to provide the instruments, skills, contacts, exposure and moral support needed to convey knowledge in timely and effective ways that bear on public policy ... informing policy from a Southern perspective (External Evaluation of IDRC's TEC Program, p.52)

The principal training activity funded by the project consisted of efforts to promote the field of environmental economics, which was barely emerging in Peru when Phase II funding was approved (Economic Research Consortium, Peru, p.15)

Building the capacity of research systems also involves improving inter-institutional collaboration. According to project evaluation reports, fostering linkages between research centres has the potential to ensure:

*" ... coordination of research agendas and efforts; better coverage of the full range of researchable policy issues; improved inter-institutional debate, exchange and cooperation; [and] greater professional consensus on leading policy issues"*¹⁶

As it relates to policy influence, institutional capacity development also includes advocacy and relationship building with decision-making apparatuses of government to ensure that research is and remains policy-relevant and that it reaches its intended beneficiaries and strengthens policy-making.

Enhancing capacity of decision-makers

In the majority of evaluation reports, comparatively less attention is given to enhancing the capacity of policymakers as a means to influence policy. The reason for this is not clear. Undoubtedly, it is due in part to the feeling that research centres and networks, academic institutions and other IDRC recipients are better placed to address capacity building issues in the research sector than in the policy sector. Nevertheless, one of the projects reviewed makes direct reference to influencing policy by enhancing the capacity of decision-makers to absorb and use research¹⁷.

¹⁵ Economic Research Consortium, Peru (Phase II): End of Project Report, p.25.

¹⁶ Economic Research Consortium, Peru (Phase II): End of Project Report, p.20.

¹⁷ Trade Employment and Competitiveness: Report of an External Evaluation.

Box 3 Raise capacities of decision-makers to absorb and use sound policy research

...to support policy research on trade, employment and competitiveness ... informing the policy process through knowledge and skills conveyed to opinion shapers and decision makers (External Evaluation of IDRC's TEC Program, p.8)

... on the "demand" side, capacity building does not encompass "training" of decision-makers. Rather, it entails activities that will deepen their understanding and appreciation for pertinent, rigorous research (External Evaluation of IDRC's TEC Program, p.51).

Capacity building of civil society

Given IDRC's commitment to supporting research that is inclusive and participatory in its approach and that prioritizes equity and sustainability as research and policy objectives, it is not surprising that a number of projects reviewed sought to include civil society¹⁸ and other stakeholders in the research and policy dimensions of the project.

Nine of projects include civil society actors and/or organizations as project stakeholders. Of these, four make specific reference to strengthening and mobilizing the capacity of these actors in ways that bear on public policy. According to the evaluation reports reviewed for this study, these projects sought to enhance the ability of civil society actors to understand and participate in research and policy processes, to interact and dialogue with other policy-interested stakeholders; and to recommend policy alternatives that better reflect the needs and interests of different sectors of society.

Box 4 To enhance capacity of civil society to participate in policy processes

It was hoped ... to stimulate a first real public debate on defence and security in Guatemala and assist civil society in proposing options in those fields (FLACSO Guatemala Security Projects p.7).

... the CRIES project on Reforming the Treaty of Democratic Security in Central America ... should significantly enhance the capacity of certain civil society leaders to understand and engage in security policy debates ... (Fostering Research for Peacebuilding in Guatemala, Central America and Colombia, p.19)

To involve and build capacity of selected villagers, [local communities], ... NGOs and others working in CF [Community Forestry] activities. (Community Forest Research Project p.4)

The project objective is, by funding community and national consultations, training, and undertaking applied research on fisheries issues conducted by and for the fisherfolk, to provide primary and secondary fisherfolk organizations in Barbados with the fishery management participation capability to meaningfully contribute to the successful implementation of a new FMP [Fisheries Management Plan] (CBCRM in the Caribbean p.6)

¹⁸ In the context of the project evaluation reports reviewed, civil society refers to a diverse set of societal actors at various levels. In most projects, civil society includes academia, non-governmental organizations, indigenous organizations, farmers and fisherfolk organizations, and community groups.

In a project on community-based forest management, for example, building the capacity of NGOs and local communities in NRM research, sought to ensure these actors are better informed and positioned to collaborate with local government institutions and contribute to the formulation of community forestry policy.

In projects related to peacebuilding and reconstruction in post-conflict countries¹⁹, the capacity building of civil society has a more direct and immediate relationship to informing and influencing policy development processes. Indeed strengthening and mobilizing the capacity of civil society to participate in policy processes is in a very real sense one of the cornerstones of policy work:

“The issues related to security and defence are central to the anchoring of democracy in Guatemala ... [yet] the lack of defence policy generated by civil society and government has meant that the military themselves have virtually always developed it by themselves”²⁰.

In this case, “civil society” refers broadly to non-military societal actors who, until recently, have had little or no voice in policy formulation in the country. Capacity building is directed at building skills and knowledge related to security and defence issues to enable civil society and government actors to participate more effectively in current national debates related to the future of democracy in Guatemala.

Among IDRC-supported projects it is clear that capacity building is a crucial mechanism through which to exercise influence on public policy processes. Projects seek to strengthen the capacity of researchers and policymakers and diversity of other policy-interested stakeholders who have the potential to play an active and influential role in research and policy fora. It seeks to convey the skills and knowledge needed to generate rigorous, high quality research and with the building of relationships to bridge the gap between research and policy-making to better ensure that research is policy relevant and used by decision-makers.

Dissemination of Policy Relevant Information

Most evaluation reports reviewed identified the critical importance of disseminating policy relevant research results as a vehicle for influencing policy. Even the best policy research will have little or no influence in policy-making arenas if results are not made available to decision-makers:

“For research to have an impact, it must be used, whether by other researchers, as part of the process of knowledge-advancement, or by other research users, including member of the media and civil society, and members of policy making circles in or out of government”²¹

¹⁹ Fostering Research for Peacebuilding in Guatemala, Central America and Colombia: A Review of the IDRC Record, 1998-2001; Evaluation Report For the International Development Research Centre: FLACSO Guatemala Security Projects.

²⁰ Evaluation Report For the International Development Research Centre: FLACSO Guatemala Security Projects, p. 11.

²¹ Economic Research Consortium, Peru (Phase II): End of Project Report, p. 24.

Given this, a significant number of evaluation reports reviewed (n=10) indicated a project's intent to influence policy through the dissemination of research outputs to policymakers and other policy-interested stakeholders.

Box 5 Dissemination of research outputs to policy-makers

... project outputs can be packaged and targeted to influence policy. They include policy briefs and papers, workshops and seminars (External Evaluation of IDRC's TEC Program, p.32).

WSP ... is involved in generating new knowledge and information on major policy issues, while simultaneously serving as the conduit or channel for introducing results or findings of participatory research and information into policy circles (WSP Model of Conflict Management, p.41)

In the evaluation reports reviewed for this study, "dissemination" refers to the sharing or exchange of research outputs and information among researchers and research institutions and between researchers and policymakers. The intent of dissemination is not only to provide crude outputs to inform decision-making but to strengthen capacity through knowledge sharing and generate a "marketplace for ideas"²² where research findings become a vehicle or catalyst for policy dialogue.

Facilitating and Strengthening Policy Dialogue

In six of the project evaluations reviewed, the intent to influence policy included the facilitation of policy dialogue. Among project evaluation reports, the concept of "dialogue" carries a range of meanings and implies different types of intent to influence policy. First and foremost, dialogue is a mechanism used to bridge the gap between policy-interested stakeholders; it seeks to build common ground between the perspectives of developed and developing countries, research and policy communities, and government and civil society.

Policy dialogue can refer to the sharing and exchange of knowledge between stakeholders:

*"to ensure that the new data and analyses (i.e. information generated) enter into policy debates and influence policy making"*²³

Here, dialogue constitutes both the dissemination and exchange of policy-related information (e.g. through newsletters, policy briefs etc.) and bringing together the main actors who create and implement policies to put the ideas and recommendations generated into action.

²² A Report of the Mid-Term Evaluation of The Eastern and Central Africa Programme for Agricultural Policy Analysis (ECAPAPA).

²³ A Report of the Mid-Term Evaluation of The Eastern and Central Africa Programme for Agricultural Policy Analysis (ECAPAPA), p.22.

Dialogue is also used as a “societal confidence and consensus building mechanism”²⁴ to bring together stakeholders of diverse viewpoints, and in particular to give a voice to civil society actors previously marginalized from decision-making fora²⁵. Among IDRC’s peacebuilding and reconstruction projects, for example, open policy dialogue is encouraged as a mechanism to reduce conflict, foster understanding, and collectively produce policy recommendations to support the rebuilding process.

In community-based participatory research, projects seek to bring community groups and local government together in dialogue to ensure that promising local research is brought to the attention of local authorities for the purposes of scaling out and up, to create a mechanism for collaboration between communities and government, and to provide new opportunities for local people to participate in local policy-making.

Box 6 Facilitate / strengthen policy dialogue between researchers, policy-makers, and other stakeholders

In an effort to promote dialogue and to facilitate exchange of experiences and information, the project also sought to bring together and link the broadest possible network of active institutions, agencies, and individuals ... to bridge the gap between research and policy-making (WSP Model of Conflict Management, p.4-5)

The [Global Financial Governance] Initiative aims to foster a dialogue that will bridge the gaps between the perspectives of the developed and developing countries and between research and policy communities. ... the Initiative will play three roles: a forum for dialogue between officials of developed and developing countries; a think-tank to disseminate research; and networking where researchers and policy-makers can exchange ideas (External Evaluation of IDRC’s TEC Program, p.20)

Evaluation reports also reveal that research, capacity building, dissemination and dialogue are not discrete policy-oriented objectives.

*WSP seeks to use policy research as a tool or vehicle for initiating dialogue and communication among different internal and external actors in order to foster greater transparency in the national policy process ... to provide a better understanding about various policy choices and alternatives that are potentially available, and to promote improved coordination among different actors*²⁶

In many of the evaluation reports reviewed, policy influence is treated as a process comprised of multiple overlapping and integrated approaches. These approaches are employed to strengthen the policy environment and contribute to the development of sound and sustainable policy options to address pressing development problems in the South.

²⁴ War-torn Societies Project and Third Party Neutral Models of Conflict Management, p. 10.

²⁵ War-torn Societies Project and Third Party Neutral Models of Conflict Management; War-torn Societies Project (WSP) Transition Programme–Somali Programme: Internal Evaluation of Activities in Northeast Somalia (Puntland).

²⁶ War-torn Societies Project and Third Party Neutral Models of Conflict Management, p. 7.

Contribute to the development of innovative policy alternatives

As discussed above, the production of policy relevant research, capacity building, dissemination of research outputs, and policy dialogue constitute areas in which IDRC-supported research seeks to influence policy processes. They are also mechanisms through which projects hope to contribute to policy change.

Nine of the evaluation reports reviewed indicated that projects aim to contribute to the development of new policies at various levels. “Contributing” to policy development may include, among other things, research to inform policy choices, generating dialogue to build understanding and consensus regarding future policy directions, and/or the provision of policy advice and/or recommendations for change.

Box 7 Contribute to the development of innovative policy alternatives

... to modify restrictive policies to better meet the needs of local people (Community-Based Upland Natural Resource Management Project p.2)

The WSP has created an interactive process through which local, national, and international actors in a specific country participate in ongoing research and dialogue to develop a common understanding of the inter-linkages between the multiple dimensions of post-conflict peacebuilding in order to identify and implement more effective policies and programs (WSP Model of Conflict Management, p.2).

...to support the creation of models and legislation that recognize the rights of indigenous and local communities to genetic resources and to the equitable sharing of benefits of the use of these resources in the context of the intellectual property regimes (IDRC's Support for Research on Agrobiodiversity: Results and Challenges, p.9).

IDRC-supported projects reviewed in this study seek to influence policy processes through various mechanisms including research and knowledge generation; strengthening of professional capacities of researchers and research institutions to produce high quality, policy relevant research; enhancing the capacities of policymakers to absorb and use research findings; strengthening and mobilizing the capacity of civil society to participate more effectively in policy processes; dissemination of research outputs to policymakers; facilitating and informing policy dialogue; and ultimately, contributing to the development of innovative policy alternatives. These initiatives are overlapping and mutually reinforcing and together constitute a process of policy influence.

The next section will examine the specific activities and approaches used by IDRC-support research to influence policy along desired trajectories.

5. ACTIVITIES AND APPROACHES TO INFLUENCE POLICY

To bring research to bear on public policy, the IDRC-supported projects reviewed for this report drew on a diverse mixture of activities and approaches. In this section, we look in some detail at these activities and approaches in order to understand how projects look to achieve policy influence of a specific kind. Table three illustrates the diversity of

activities and approaches used by projects to influence policy as documented in the evaluation reports reviewed for this study.

TABLE 3 ACTIVITIES/APPROACHES TO INFLUENCE POLICY

	No. of reports (n=16)
Produce policy relevant research and/or analysis	13
Participation of government agencies, policy/decision-makers at various levels, extension agents etc. in project	10
Capacity building	
Workshops, seminars, conferences, roundtables	9
Training (e.g. short courses)	7
Small / competitive grants	3
Peer Review	1
Mentoring	2
Networking	4
Enablement	2
“Learning by doing”	2
Dissemination of information/knowledge	
Publications, reports, working papers, newsletters, policy briefs	11
Internet websites, databases	4
Outreach / networking / awareness raising with government officials and other key stakeholders	11
Workshops, seminars, meetings, policy roundtables	9
Facilitate/strengthen policy dialogue:	
Working groups, task forces	4
Policy roundtables, workshops	3
Consultations / networking	5
No activity specified	1
No activities specified	2

Produce policy relevant research and/or analysis

Research is one of the principal vehicles through which projects look to inform policy processes in the South. Thirteen of the evaluation reports reviewed for this study involved research activities undertaken to influence policy. Projects produce diverse types of research involving the natural and social sciences as well as social and economic policy research. Research activities are targeted at various levels of analysis, ranging from local community-based research (for example, to inform local and provincial forestry policies) to policy analyses seeking to inform national, regional and/or international policy processes (such as the legal and economic aspects of intellectual property regimes).

Box 8 Produce policy relevant research and/or analysis

... Generation of knowledge regarding use, users and value of forest resources in local communities and livelihoods ... Understanding and mobilization of CF as a result of and using knowledge from PAR and knowledge regarding use, users and value of forest resources in local communities ... Sharing of knowledge generated ... to influence the policy environment (Community Forestry Research Project, p.3)

... action research on Local Reintegration Strategies in Central America and Colombia ... its basic objectives were to study the effects of and local responses to the resettlement of persons displaced by violence; generate concerted processes leading to policies and strategies addressing the multiple effects of displacement ... foster spaces for knowledge generation and exchange between Central America and Colombia ... (Fostering Research for Peacebuilding in Guatemala, Central America and Colombia p.14)

Some of the key policy [analysis] areas for project development are: investment levels in public goods, e.g. in R&D, education, health, transport and infrastructure; institutional arrangements, e.g. land tenure systems, market structure, intellectual property rights; ... response to external change, e.g. WTO, AGOA, Lome Convention; response to internal change, e.g. HIV/AIDS, regional integration, natural resource management and use, e.g. response to drought shocks, shared resources such as Lake Victoria and land tenure systems ... (ECAPAPA Mid-Term Evaluation, p.3)

To bring research to bear on public policy, most of the projects reviewed implemented corollary activities such those aimed at disseminating research outputs and using these outputs as a platform for dialogue and policy action.

Participation of government agencies and decision-makers in the project

The participation of decision-makers and government bodies in projects is an important mechanism for ensuring that research is policy relevant and linked to policy-making processes. Ten of evaluation reports reviewed for this study identify policy actors including government agencies or departments, individual policymakers at the national level, provincial and local authorities, and extension agents as project stakeholders or participants. Although many projects do not directly attribute the participation of such policy actors to an intent to influence policy, it can be reasonably inferred from the evaluation reports reviewed.

One of the main reasons for including policy actors in projects is to ensure that research reflects the needs of policymakers through joint agenda setting at the outset of the project:

"The projects place a great emphasis on linking researchers and policy-makers and ensuring that research activities are dictated largely by the needs of policy-makers. ... TEC projects have encouraged genuine interaction between researchers and policy-makers in setting the research agenda..."²⁷

²⁷ Trade Employment and Competitiveness: Report of an External Evaluation, p.32.

Beyond research agenda setting, policy actors participated in a variety of activities during the lifespan of a given project. Policymakers and government agencies occasionally participated in the process of research and knowledge generation itself²⁸. Workshops, seminars, and conferences often encouraged the participation of policymakers to ensure the dissemination of findings and to facilitate dialogue between research and policy actors. In some projects, researchers were paired with officials from relevant government departments as a mentoring exercise. Policymakers were involved in formal networks and informal networking relationships with researchers to facilitate the exchange of ideas and improve collaboration between research and policy sectors. Finally, in several projects, policy actors participated in task forces, working groups, and policy roundtables responsible for setting research priorities, conducting policy analysis, debating research and policy issues, and/or channelling research findings and policy recommendations into policy circles.

Box 9 Participation of government agencies, policy / decision-makers at various levels in the project

The research component of WSP would involve a series of comparative country studies of ongoing efforts to rebuild war torn societies with a particular focus on the effectiveness of the mix of actors and policies involved in social, political and economic reconstruction. This research would be conducted by multi-disciplinary teams of researchers and policy-makers at the local and international levels (Wart-torn Societies Project as a Model of Conflict Management, p.4)

The stakeholders involved in TRAMIL projects are varied and largely identified at the government and university level. ... TRAMIL collaboration with health officers in each country culminated in a meeting hosted by the Health Minister of Panama, and the meeting was attended by representatives of Health Ministers and the main universities from Panama, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Cuba, Venezuela, and the Dominican Republic (SUB Program's Use of Indigenous Knowledge in Selected Projects, p.30)

According to one project, the participation of policy actors in such a spectrum of activities ensures that projects have a greater influence on policy-making:

*"Ideally, researchers and research users should come together early in the project development process, and should be in contact for the duration of the project. In this way, research can be expected to have a larger impact on policy than could ever be the case by merely inviting research users to the table during the dissemination phase"*²⁹

Capacity building

Ten of evaluation reports reviewed for this study described project activities implemented to strengthen and mobilize the capacity of a variety of research, academic, policy and civil society actors as a means to influence policy directions.

²⁸ For example see: Community Forest Research Project: Mid-Term Evaluation.

²⁹ Economic Research Consortium, Peru (Phase II): End of Project Report, p. 33.

Researchers and scholars

To strengthen the capacities of researchers and scholars, formal and highly structured activities, such workshops and training courses, were most commonly used among the projects reviewed. Workshops, seminars and conferences (n=9) offered researchers and scholars from national and regional institutions a more interactive forum to present research results and secure feedback from colleagues. Such events also facilitated a broader sharing of ideas and experience among peers and supported and strengthened inter-institutional collaboration. The participation of policymakers often provided an opportunity for networking and dialogue between research and policy actors.

Training exercises were utilized to strengthen the capacity of researchers and scholars in new research methods and approaches (e.g. community based natural resource management, participatory action research) and in newly emerging policy areas (e.g. environmental economics) in seven of projects reviewed. In a smaller number of projects, the use of small grants (n=3) and peer review exercises (n=1) strengthened the capacity of researchers to produce and publish an innovative policy research outputs.

Less frequently, projects also explored more informal capacity building opportunities. Four projects encouraged networking between researchers and policymakers as a way for researchers to strengthen their relationship with the policy community and improve their understanding of current policy issues and the needs of policymakers. In two projects, mentoring relationships between international and senior and more junior researchers and between researchers and senior government officials were fostered to strengthen research capacity through the sharing of knowledge and experience.

Two projects make vague reference to “learning by doing” as a capacity building strategy, although it is not at all clear who such activities are intended for and how, if at all, such activities are aimed at influencing public policy.

Policymakers

To recall, only one of the evaluation reports reviewed indicated the intent to influence policy by strengthening the capacity of policymakers to absorb and use sound research³⁰. According to the TEC evaluation report, this was achieved through “short courses” for policymakers offered through TIPS and the LATN network. The approach and focus of the short courses is not discussed in the report.

³⁰ Trade Employment and Competitiveness: Report of an External Evaluation.

Box 11 Capacity building

Researchers and scholars

The workshops created a space to debate policies among centres who do not necessarily share the same political or economic perspectives. They contributed to networking and to an evolving research culture involving a greater degree of peer review and inter-institutional collaboration (Economic Research Consortium, Peru, p.20).

Capacity building was of two types: through participation in policy analysis projects and in short courses and workshops for policy research and analysis (ECAPAPA Mid-Term Evaluation, p.10)

The Consortium organized a special study on the state of environmental research in Peru, and the publication of two readers in environmental economics. These readers are collections of seminal articles on the subject ... for use as teaching aids in the country's universities ... which also contributed to capacity-building in this field. (Economic Research Consortium, Peru, p.15)

... collaboration included conscious efforts to link more experienced African researchers with their junior colleagues, and researchers with policy-makers. The AWTS project's networking and collaborative strategies successfully linked international with senior and more junior African researchers and involved considerable mentoring. In addition, a sustained effort was made to involve policy-makers, particularly in the country case studies, by pairing a researcher from an academic institution with a senior official from an appropriate government department. (External Evaluation of IDRC's TEC Program p.30)

Capacity building at all levels is built into this process through training, study tours, learning by doing, and through sharing of experiences (Community Forestry Research Project, p.17)

Policy-makers

... in short focused courses offered through TIPS and the LATN network in particular, TEC support has raised their [government officials] appreciation and capacities to absorb good economic research (External Evaluation of IDRC's TEC Program, p.13)

Civil Society

... to generate a significant participation of the local population for protecting the environment ... other initiatives will be oriented toward environmental education and capacity building among school clientele and larger population (training sessions, scientific-community workshops, creation of data-bases, promotion of loci of exchanges between various stakeholders at the local, scientific and decision-making levels (CBCRM in the Caribbean p.31)

Civil Society

Activities aimed at enhancing the capacity of civil society actors and organizations are less clear in the evaluation reports reviewed for this study. In one of the projects reviewed ³¹, capacity building tools included training and workshop activities focusing on environmental education for civil society groups and the creation of research databases to improve local people's access to information.

³¹ Preliminary Evaluation: Community Based Coastal Resources Management Program in the Caribbean.

For the most part, however IDRC-supported projects do not rely on formal or highly structured activities to meet this objective. Rather, evaluation reports suggest that strengthening the capacity of civil society is more commonly (and perhaps successfully) achieved through their enhanced participation in research and policy processes. In NRM projects, for example, this may involve expanding the role of communities in local research activities and strengthening their participation in local policy-making processes pertaining to resource management³². In the peacebuilding and reconstruction projects reviewed, capacity building of civil society seems to have been directed toward encouraging new approaches to policy dialogue and decision-making that give a voice to indigenous organizations, NGOs and other civilian groups. One of the projects reviewed also sought to support research and policy recommendations developed by indigenous organizations and to assist them in presenting these proposals for policy consideration³³. While these activities are not easily categorized, the overall approach is that of civil society enablement or empowerment.

Dissemination of research outputs to users

The dissemination of research results to policymakers and other research users can be an efficient means of getting research findings into policy circles. Thirteen of reviewed projects engaged in a variety of dissemination activities so that policymakers may have access to research findings. Eleven of projects developed and circulated materials such as reports, working papers, books and journal publications, newsletters and policy briefs, in printed and/or electronic format, to policymakers and other research users. Four also reported using Internet websites and databases to share information with a broad range of research users. These constitute more formal and standardized approaches to disseminating research results, and were utilized largely because of their ability to reach a wide and diverse audience.

In conjunction with the circulation of printed and electronic materials, the majority of projects reviewed also drew on other media of dissemination that involve professional interaction and information sharing. Nine of project used workshops, seminars and other meetings to exchange project information with researchers and policymakers in a more interactive forum. Ten of evaluation reports document the importance of informal outreach or networking with government officials and other key stakeholders as a means to raise awareness regarding emerging policy issues, share project information as well as receive valued feedback.

³² Preliminary Evaluation: Community Based Coastal Resources Management Program. in the Caribbean; Hue University of Agriculture and Forestry Community-Based Upland Natural Resource Management Project: Team Self-Evaluation.

³³ Fostering Research for Peacebuilding in Guatemala, Central America and Colombia: A Review of the IDRC Record, 1998-2001.

Box 10 Dissemination of research outputs to users

Within the WSP methodology, interactive research results and policy findings are disseminated not only through the publication of reports but through direct contact and exchange in various workshops organized at both the country and international levels. These workshops are intended to provide a catalytic role in policy translating recommendations into action and also the opportunity for participants to discuss, reach a better understanding of the issues at stake, and draw conclusions (WSP Model of Conflict Management, p.38)

... using discussions of key issues in the field to produce and disseminate 10 booklets on important security and defence themes in order to strengthen policy engagement capacity (FLACSO Guatemala Security Projects p.3)

Publications in the form of books, articles, and working papers are only one form of outreach to research users. Among the other forms being used by the Consortium is the Research Bulletin, which played an important role in addition to academic vehicles, by disseminating summaries of the best research results in a way most likely to be of use to research users. The Consortium further contributed to policy discourse through seminars, policy-roundtables, and conferences (Economic Research Consortium, Peru, p.26)

One of the vehicles for raising awareness of economic and social policy issues was through the organization of conferences, seminars and workshops ... with good representation from various sectors of society (Economic Research Consortium, Peru, p.21)

LATN has tried to reach out to a wider audience of “users” – policymakers, trade negotiators, key economic players as well as trade analysts generally – by publishing a series of Briefs that reach 600-900 people through direct mail or Internet (External Evaluation of IDRC’s TEC Program, p.38)

The main objective of dissemination activities is to ensure that policy relevant information reaches decision-makers and increases the capability of decision-makers to participate in policy debate and implement informed, sound policy choices.

Facilitating / strengthening policy dialogue

Capacity building and dissemination activities seek to ensure the production of high quality research and make certain that research findings and outputs are shared with decision-makers and other research users. In many projects, research is then used as a vehicle for generating policy-oriented dialogue. Dialogue activities create spaces for stakeholders to communicate in order to share research results with, and receive feedback from key stakeholders, identify and reach consensus on policy priorities, discuss and debate current policy issues, and/or formulate new policy alternatives.

Nine of evaluation reports reviewed for this study indicated that IDRC-supported projects sought to influence public policy by facilitating or strengthening dialogue among researchers, policymakers and other stakeholders. Policy dialogue was encouraged by creating opportunities and spaces for policy-interested stakeholders to interact personally and professionally. Four of the evaluation reports discussed the strategic use of working groups and/or task forces to generate policy dialogue among key stakeholders. These groups were typically assembled for a fixed period to meet a

specific set of objectives and produce outputs (e.g. policy advice and/or recommendations) to contribute to an active policymaking process. In the WSP projects³⁴, for example, working groups composed of government officials, researchers and academics, NGOs and other civil society actors were established to meet and collectively analyse the specific policy and rebuilding tasks of a given policy sector and to produce policy recommendations based on the group's findings.

Policy roundtables, workshops and other stakeholder meetings were organized as dialogue fora in three of the projects reviewed. Unlike working groups and task forces, these activities were not organized to produce specific policy recommendations nor were they attached to specific policy processes. Such events were organized primarily to facilitate the exchange ideas and experiences and generate policy discussion by bringing together a diverse group of policy-interested stakeholders with few opportunities for policy engagement of this type outside such fora. These activities were short in duration (3-5 days) but commonly involved intensive interaction and exchange.

Five of the projects reviewed used networking and consultation activities to dialogue with researchers, policymakers and other policy-interested stakeholders. Researchers were found to network, formally and informally, with colleagues to work on specific national and regional policy issues over the short and long-term. Networking activities also included the building of professional relationships with policymakers over time for the purpose of sharing information, seeking advice and improving collaboration between research and policy sectors. Projects also conducted formal consultations with policymakers to share project information and solicit feedback related to the policy dimensions of the research.

³⁴ War-torn Societies Project and Third Party Neutral Models of Conflict Management; War-torn Societies Project (WSP) Transition Programme–Somali Programme: Internal Evaluation of Activities in Northeast Somalia (Puntland).

Box 12 Facilitate / strengthen policy dialogue

The Crucible project brought together individuals from around the world working in various sectors (government, academic, corporate, civil society) to critically discuss issues and formulation policy recommendations related to the use, conservation, and ownership of plant genetic resources (IDRC's Support for Research on Agrobiodiversity: Results and Challenges, p.23)

The seed harmonization exercise linked a wide variety of policy-interested groups and provided opportunities for dialogue on policy issues. The series of stakeholder meetings, the weekly electronic newsletter, periodic publications, workshops and seminars were used in this regard (Mid-Term Review of ECAPAPA, p.11)

Government policies and projects supporting re-forestation restrict villagers' access to land which villages would otherwise use for agriculture ... The project team facilitate[d] continued communication among [village and government] stakeholders in order to develop ways to eventually modify restrictive policies to better meet the needs of local people (Community-Based Upland Resource Management, p.2).

... working groups meet regularly and collectively analyse the specific policy and rebuilding tasks of a given policy sector or issue. The close association between research and policy sectors in the working groups, which are comprised of members from both sectors, thus ensures that research remains policy relevant and analysis is translated into operationally relevant language and advice. (WSP Model of Conflict Management, p.6)

Planning: FMP [Fisheries Management Plan] review opened to all marine and coastal stakeholders. ... Fishing industry final report on recommendations for inclusion in the new FMP. National and community consultations forecast in November 2000. Conclusion of the review process and legal approval by the Fisheries Minister (CBCRM in the Caribbean, p.7)

Within SSA, and indeed elsewhere, TEC has made considerable use of networks and networking. The networks have ranged from individuals working together for a given period on a common set of issues within one country (TIPS) or across a region (COMESA II) to a more formal involvement of institutes (ECOWAS). (External Evaluation of IDRC's TEC Program, p.35).

According to the evaluation reports reviewed, dialogue activities appear to have fostered an iterative learning process in which research informed and was informed by policy discussion among key research and policy stakeholders. Less clear are the activities or fora used to draw civil society into policy dialogue. Nevertheless, in bringing new stakeholders such as civil society actors to the table, such dialogue serves to better ensure that policy processes, and perhaps future policies themselves, are more equitable and sustainable.

6. INFLUENCE ON PUBLIC POLICY PROCESSES

Having examined the intent of IDRC-supported research to influence policy and the activities and approaches employed to realize said influence, this section will explore the achievements of IDRC projects in influencing public policy processes, as documented in the evaluation reports reviewed for this study.

Among the majority of evaluation reports reviewed, “policy influence” constitutes what Lindquist (2001) refers to as “intermediate influences” – influences on policy-interested stakeholders and policy-making processes rather than the actual development and implementation of new policies (*policy impact*). Most evaluation reports characterized achievements in policy influence in terms of informing policy processes and improving the policy environment in which projects are working. In many cases, policy influence was of the kind anticipated or intended at the outset of the project, although several projects reported that unanticipated types of policy influence had emerged over the project’s lifespan. Table four outlines the types of policy influence claimed by the evaluation reports reviewed for this study.

TABLE 4 TYPES OF POLICY INFLUENCE ACHIEVED

	No. of reports (n=16)
Contributions to the advance of policy relevant knowledge	8
Significant increase in capacity of researchers, organizations, civil society, policymakers	8
Successful dissemination of research outputs	3
Use of research results as inputs into policies, programs	4
Strengthened policy dialogue	3
Changes in attitudes and approaches of policy/decision-makers and other stakeholders	2
Researchers acting as advisors to government or taking important government positions and playing active role in policy design at various levels	2
Contributions to the development of policy alternatives and proposals	5
No policy influence documented	2

It is crucial to remember that a number of the projects reviewed are still in progress and as such are not yet at a stage where real policy influence may have been achieved.

Contributing to the advance of policy relevant knowledge

According to the evaluation reports reviewed for this study contributions to the advance of policy relevant knowledge constitutes one of the most prevalent ways in which IDRC-supported research has influenced public policy processes. Eight of the evaluation reports indicated that the projects under review had in some way contributed to the advance of policy relevant knowledge. It is possible that an even larger percentage of projects have made such contributions, however many evaluation reports did bear this

information. Activities aimed at producing research, building the capacity of researchers to generate high quality, rigorous, policy relevant research outputs, and disseminating research outputs to users have made such contributions to knowledge possible. This includes not only filling gaps in the existing knowledge of researchers and policymakers but also introducing and advocating new fields of policy inquiry and putting these issues on the agendas of policymakers. The evaluation reports do not however provide concrete and substantiated evidence demonstrating that, for example, new issues had been put on the agendas of policymakers, stating only that this outcome was achieved.

Box 13 Contributing to the advance of policy relevant knowledge

The Consortium also contributed significantly to the advance of policy relevant knowledge, through publications, seminars, conferences and workshops ... PERC research was uniformly praised for its policy relevance, and PERC-supported researchers played a hand in policy advice and formulation in various areas of decision-making (Economic Research Consortium, Peru, p.35)

Studies done by the Third World Network and RAFI have dealt with issues related to biopiracy, the protection of indigenous knowledge, and farmers' rights in relation to international policy making bodies such as the Convention on Biodiversity, the WTO/Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, the FAO and the International Undertaking, and the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants. Their efforts have contributed to raising broader awareness, putting issues of importance on the agendas, and bringing the voices of indigenous peoples to the negotiations table (IDRC's Support for Research on Agrobiodiversity: Results and Challenges, p.23).

These contributions to policy relevant knowledge also influence policy by improving the visibility and reputation of individual researchers and research institutions in policy arenas and the capacity of research to convince and guide policymakers along desired policy trajectories.

Significant increases in the capacity of civil society, researchers and policymakers

Among the evaluation reports reviewed, IDRC-supported research reportedly achieved significant increases in the capacity of researchers, policymakers and other stakeholders in a way that had bearing on policy processes. Eight of evaluation reports indicated that projects had influenced policy by increasing the capacities of policy-interested stakeholders. Based on these reports, capacity building appears to be one of the most prevalent ways in which IDRC-supported research has influenced public policy processes.

The organizational capacity of research institutions has been enhanced in two projects by encouraging inter-centre collaboration and networking with research and governmental institutions responsible for policy analysis, formulation and implementation³⁵. In the Peru Economic Research Consortium, for example, workshops

³⁵ Expanding the Horizon: An Evaluation of the Mekong Delta Farming Systems Research and Development Institutes Capacity Development Efforts; Economic Research Consortium, Peru (Phase II): End of Project Report.

were found to increase peer review, professional networking and inter-institutional collaboration leading to an evolving research culture across institutions in the region.

Significant increases in the research capacity of national and regional institutions in ways that bear on public policy were documented in only two of the evaluation reports reviewed for this study³⁶. In both cases enhanced research capacity was achieved mainly through increased exchange and utilization of research results across institutions.

According to evaluation reports, the capacity of individual researchers has also been significantly enhanced, however evaluation reports do not identify the capacity building activities or approaches that were most useful in raising research capacities. Successful capacity building has in many cases improved the competence and credibility of researchers in policy-oriented research and analysis. Increased competence and credibility has in turn strengthened the position of these researchers in policy arenas and improved the demand for policy-relevant research by decision-making bodies at national, regional and international levels.

Increases in the capacity of policymakers and policy-making institutions are documented in three of evaluation reports reviewed, although the nature of capacity building is less clearly articulated. In general, it appears that the capacity of policymakers to understand, appreciate and absorb good research has been enhanced. In one project, this is attributed to the use of short courses targeted at policymakers³⁷. Beyond this, it appears that the capacity of policymakers has been strengthened through increased professional interaction and dialogue with the research community and improved access to research findings that bear on active public policy issues.

IDRC-supported research also has the potential to improve the capacity of government. According to the WSP-Somalia evaluation report, the capacity of parliament and government institutions to assess government performance and pass legislation was significantly enhanced by the adoption of the WSP participatory methodology. The WSP project had neither intended nor anticipated this achievement, highlighting the dynamic and often unpredictable nature of research.

Significant increases in the capacity of civil society actors and organizations are also documented in the evaluation reports reviewed for this study. In particular, an increase in the capacity of indigenous organizations and leaders to understand policy issues, participate in policy-making processes, and produce and communicate policy recommendations and/or formal proposals to government was documented in three of projects reviewed (the same number of projects that sought this type of influence). This is a significant contribution to public policy in that it has brought new voices and perspectives to the policy table and has the potential to lead to the formulation of more equitable and sustainable policies in the long term.

³⁶ Economic Research Consortium, Peru (Phase II): End of Project Report; Review of Sustainable Use of Biodiversity (SUB) Program Initiative's Use of Local and Indigenous Knowledge in Selected Projects.

³⁷ Trade Employment and Competitiveness: Report of an External Evaluation.

Box 14 Significant increase in capacity of civil society, researchers and policy makers

Researchers and Research Institutions

The workshops created a space to debate policies among centres who do not necessarily share the same political and economic perspectives. They contributed to networking and to an evolving research culture involving a greater degree of peer-review and inter-institutional collaboration (Economic Research Consortium, Peru, p.20).

TRAMIL Centroamerica is significantly contributing to the capacity building of all those national and regional institutions involved in medicinal plants work through the exchange of scientific research and the practical utilization of research results (SUB Program Initiative's Use of Indigenous Knowledge in Selected Projects, p.30)

... several TEC projects can be associated with building and strengthening an indigenous core group of trade and trade policy researchers. ... This core group is demonstrating growing competence and research credibility in the area of trade policy analysis. Individual members of this group are also gaining national, regional and international recognition as evident from a growing demand for their involvement in research projects and advisory panels organized by such international institutions as the World Bank, the IMF, WTO, UNCTAD, UNDP ... (External Evaluation of IDRC's TEC Program, p.30-1)

Policy-makers

... through TIPS and the LATN network in particular, TEC support has raised their [government officials] appreciations and capacities to absorb good economic research (External Evaluation of IDRC's TEC Program p.13)

Observers of the second session of parliament felt that the adoption of the WSP participatory methodology had helped improve the parliaments capacity to assess government performance and pass legislations (WSP-Somalia Evaluation, p.9)

Civil Society

The support received from PERC allowed DESCO to reinforce the analytical capacity and the ability to make policy recommendations of a large part of civil society that does not feel represented by the present government and which does not share official views in matters of economic and social policy (Economic Research Consortium, Peru, p.27)

Most of the completed and active projects reviewed ... have also enhanced the ability of civil society leaders, particularly indigenous leaders, to understand and lobby on complex issues like education financing and agrarian jurisprudence (Fostering Research for Peacebuilding in Guatemala, Central America, and Colombia, p.11)

The project significantly enhanced CNPRE's [Permanent National Commission on Education Reform of the Coordination of Organizations of the Mayan People of Guatemala] capacity for budgetary analysis, positioned it at the cutting edge of the national debate, and enhanced its policy dialogue with key officials at the Ministry of Education, including the Minister himself (Fostering Research for Peacebuilding in Guatemala, Central America, and Colombia, p.5-6).

Successful outreach and dissemination of policy relevant information

Despite the fact that several projects (n=10) sought to influence policy through the dissemination of research outputs to policymakers and other research users, only three

evaluation reports indicated whether such activities achieved any measure of policy influence. These three reports documented that the dissemination of research results through regional and national workshops and the development and circulation of policy-relevant materials had demonstrated influence on policy processes. The TEC evaluation, for example, reported that policymakers and other stakeholders typically found TEC-supported research outputs of value. In Africa, the quality and relevance of research outputs was found to influence policy through, among other things, enhancing the visibility and position of TEC-supported research and researchers in regional and international policy fora.

The ECAPAPA project found that the dissemination and exchange of policy relevant information had a positive effect on policy-making processes in the Eastern and Central Africa (ECA) region.

Box 15 Successful outreach and dissemination of policy relevant information

... there is evidence that project outputs have reached intended beneficiaries who, by and large, appear to have found them valuable. For example, results from the AWTs project have drawn the AERC and its network of researchers more deeply into the African trade policy process, particularly at the regional level. These results have been disseminated through two regional workshops, eight national workshops and a widely distributed project summary report. Consequently AERC has been invited by the OAU, UNECA, UNDP, and WTO Africa Group to assist African countries in preparing for the post-Seattle WTO negotiations as well as the post Lome ACP-EU negotiations (External Evaluation of IDRC's TEC Program, p.32)

... ECAPAPA's activities have already had a substantial beneficial effect on the region's agricultural policy choices and policy-making processes. The policy information exchange, especially through the weekly electronic newsletter, was highly valued by most stakeholders (Mid-Term Evaluation of ECAPAPA, p.1)

The WSP Somalia project also reported successful dissemination of research outputs, in the form of entry point papers, to policymakers at various levels. Evidence of successful government outreach and dissemination is found in the use of these outputs in policy-making processes. This will be discussed in the next section.

It is unclear whether or not other projects reviewed have achieved policy influence through the dissemination of research results.

Use of research results/outputs as inputs into policy processes

The use of research results and outputs as inputs into policy processes constitutes more concrete evidence of policy influence that can be easily substantiated. Four evaluation reports document this type of policy influence. The WSP evaluation reports indicate that research outputs such as entry point papers have influenced parliamentary proceedings by giving policymakers new policy issues to explore that are relevant to the rebuilding process. In the WSP-Somalia project, research outputs were used as reference materials by government ministries and individual policymakers participating in

parliamentary sessions. Here, “use” does not necessarily refer to the translation of research findings into policy (although this may occur in the future). Rather, “use” seems to imply that policymakers are referencing research outputs, identifying valuable and relevant findings, and using them to inform on-going policy debate and decision-making. In both WSP evaluation reports, policy-makers and other project participants interviewed during the evaluation process substantiated these claims of policy influence.

Box 16 Use of research results as inputs into policy processes

The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Security claims to have adopted the WSP methodology. WSP research papers are said to be used by parliamentarians attending the second session. ... WSP staff in Puntland claim that government officials use WSP research products in carrying out their functions ... (WSP Somalia Project, p.9)

WSP products [entry point papers] have relevance for the Ministry of the Interior as we use them as reference material. ... Even the second session of the Puntland parliament is totally different from the first one because of influence by WSP products and methodology ... In qaad sessions, folks now talk about issues that have relevance for rebuilding and not about personalities (or group) interest, as in the past. Topics for discussion often include themes researched by WSP in the main research phase e.g. governance, taxation, health, education, economic, etc. This was not common two years back (WSP Somalia Project, p.9).

In other projects, policy research results and analyses have been used as the basis for the development of national and regional policy proposals³⁸. For example, ECAPAPA's policy research and analysis on the harmonization of seed policy and regulations in East Africa was used as the basis for the regional seed sector harmonization activity that produced concrete policy actions.

Strengthening policy dialogue

Three of the projects reviewed successfully established new mechanisms to encourage cooperation and dialogue among diverse stakeholders including policymakers, researchers and civil society actors and organizations. Several other projects reviewed have similar potential to strengthen policy dialogue, however as they are currently in progress, it is unclear the extent of influence these activities will have on policy-making processes at this time.

In the case of the WSP projects³⁹, new dialogue mechanisms have had a dramatic influence on the policy environment and policy-making processes through the strengthening of relationships between important stakeholders, bringing new and important voices to the discussion table, building consensus and cooperation between opposing viewpoints, and creating a constructive neutral space for the exchange of

³⁸ Fostering Research for Peacebuilding in Guatemala, Central America and Colombia: A Review of the IDRC Record, 1998-2001; A Report of the Mid-Term Evaluation of The Eastern and Central Africa Programme for Agricultural Policy Analysis (ECAPAPA).

³⁹ War-torn Societies Project (WSP) Transition Programme–Somali Programme: Internal Evaluation of Activities in Northeast Somalia (Puntland); War-torn Societies Project and Third Party Neutral Models of Conflict Management.

experience and ideas and the generation of policy alternatives that have strengthened the rebuilding process.

Box 17 Strengthening policy dialogue

“Before, there was no interaction between professionals, political leaders and other local actors living in different administrative regions. Despair and a lack of orientation accompanied the uncertainty that followed the Somali disintegration. WSP created a forum for disillusioned local people who had not previously been able to come together and discuss issues of common interest” (G p.5).

ECAPAPA has also succeeded in facilitating direct dialogue among researchers and policymakers across the ECA region as part of its seed sector harmonization activity. Dialogue generated amongst the specific officials responsible for seed registration, seed certification, crop breeding and foundation seed, seed multiplication and marketing successfully identified policy constraints in the seed industry across the ECA region and developed a consensus on the relaxation of constraints. ECAPAPA's evaluators expect that this dialogue approach would be used as a model for addressing other regional policy – further evidence of the success of the approach.

Changes in attitudes and approaches of policy/decision-makers and other stakeholders

The WSP evaluations also provide concrete evidence of policy influence in terms of changing the attitudes of policy stakeholders through the use of a very innovative approach. The WSP methodology involved an interactive participatory process of policy research and dialogue as a means to examine key sources of conflict among external, governmental, and societal actors engaged in the process of peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction. This approach was found to be extremely unique and effective as a societal confidence and consensus-building tool and had enormous influence in changing the attitudes and approaches of policymakers and civil society actors involved in the peacebuilding process.

Box 18 Changes in attitudes and approaches of policy/decision-makers and other stakeholders

"Participants of the WSP process internalized the principle of dialogue and promoted it. Local NGOs, civil society and the public appear to have increase use of participatory approach[es] in decision-making" (WSP Somalia Project, p.11)

"We traditional leaders [now] use participatory methods of mediation and consensus in resolving conflict" (WSP Somalia Project, p.12)

"I have used the participatory approach in parliamentary functions" (WSP Somalia Project, p.12).

The Ministry of the Interior ... have incorporated some of the tools of participatory action research in the work of the Ministry, for example, consultation with lineage leaders and the public at large (WSP Somalia Project, p.9)

In the WSP-Somalia evaluation reports traditional leaders, local NGOs, a number of government ministries and policymakers, and the police force in Puntland all report to have adopted some of the participatory methods and principles of consultation and conflict mediation. This is a very powerful avenue of policy influence given the context of the project.

Researchers playing active role in policy design

Another area of policy influence noted in two of the evaluation reports reviewed for this study was the growing participation of researchers in policy-making processes⁴⁰. In both projects, the demand for researchers to provide policy advise as consultants and in official government positions is attributed to capacity building exercises that have improved the rigour and policy relevance of research and the reputation and visibility of highly qualified researchers.

Box 19 Researchers playing active role in policy design

Researchers supported by the Consortium at different times have played a direct and active role in policy design. For example, Patricia Arregui and Jaime Saavedra have worked in various projects as consultants for the Ministry of Education. Javier Excobal ... has been an advisor to the Ministry of Agriculture, and was a member of the Comision de Reforma del Estado. He was also the director of the Empresa Municipal de Mercados Mayoristas. Jaime Saavedra whose work on employment and labour legislation was financed by PERC, was principal advisor for a year in the Ministry of Labour and then member of the Consultative Commission established in this area. Grade researchers meet regularly with officials of the World Bank, the IADB, FAO, ILO, along with other agencies ... investment banks and international consulting firms to share specialized information o the economy. (Economic Research Consortium, Peru, p.27)

⁴⁰ Trade Employment and Competitiveness: Report of an External Evaluation; Economic Research Consortium, Peru (Phase II): End of Project Report.

Clearly, such achievements have a measurable influence on policy-making. They demonstrate a bridging of the gap between IDRC-supported research and policy, with research (and researchers) informing and strengthening active policy-making processes at national, regional and international levels.

Contributing to the development of policy alternatives and policy proposals

Most of the areas of policy influence discussed above have contributed to the ability of many of the projects reviewed to participate in the formulation and proposal of new policies to government bodies at various levels. Five evaluation reports reviewed for this study indicated that IDRC-supported research had contributed to the development and proposal of new and innovative policy alternatives during the projects' lifespan.

These policy proposals constitute significant achievements in influencing the policy environment of Southern countries at the local, provincial, national and regional levels and demonstrate the effectiveness of project activities aimed to achieve such influence.

Box 20 Contributing to the development of policy alternatives and proposals

Regionally

ECAPAPA facilitated direct dialogue amongst specific officials ... in identifying policy constraints in the seed industry in the East African Community countries (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania), and developing consensus on the relaxation of constraints (Mid-Term Evaluation of ECAPAPA, p.11)

This project demonstrated that new policies could be developed through direct dialogue amongst the specific officials responsible for seed registration, seed certification, crop breeding and foundation seed, seed multiplication and marketing, as well as those responsible for trade restrictions at national borders and others. Each of these actors could block implementation, if they were not closely integrated into the policy change process from the start. (Mid-Term Evaluation of ECAPAPA, p.26)

The projects in Zimbabwe and Viet Nam have produced significant inputs for the national policy and legislation design and drafting processes; and the work in Zimbabwe is also part of an effort by the Organization of African Unity to draft model legislation for its member countries (IDRC's Support for Research on Agrobiodiversity: Results and Challenges, p.23)

Nationally

[National Acacia Advisory] Committees have had a considerable effect on deliberations about national policies and, as a result, countries have developed or are considering ICT policies as well as policies that are sector specific, such as the role of ICTs in education and health (Evaluation and Learning System for Acacia, p.5-6)

With a grant from PBR ... CNPT produced a legislative proposal for the creation of an Agrarian and Environmental Jurisdiction in Guatemala. The proposal for the establishment of an accessible, specialized tribunals system to resolve land-based disputes seems robust; it is certainly the first draft law proposed by a Guatemalan indigenous organization on a matter that is usually the preserve of elite jurists (Fostering Research for Peacebuilding in Guatemala, Central America and Colombia, p.6)

Locally / Provincially

In Siem Reap, the target villages have assessed the community forest boundaries and developed community forest regulations with the support of FAO and PoFW [Provincial Office of Forestry and Wildlife]. The regulations are awaiting approval from the provincial Governor (Community Forestry Research Project, p.5).

Although these policies are in the proposal stage pending consideration by government actors and agencies, they constitute potential areas of genuine *policy impact*.

Based on the evaluation reports reviewed, IDRC-supported research appears to have achieved a range of anticipated and unanticipated *intermediate influences* on policy-interested stakeholders and policy-making processes and may have the potential to realize genuine policy impact in Southern countries over the long-term. Of course, the evidence provided by evaluation reports pertaining to policy influence is not comprehensive and will be substantiated through other methods (e.g. project case studies) as part of IDRC's Strategic Policy Influence Study.

7. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO POLICY INFLUENCE

To better understand and learn from the successes and shortcomings of IDRC-supported research in achieving policy influence, the following sections explore what evaluation reports identified as the factors facilitating and inhibiting policy influence. Seven of the evaluation reports reviewed for this study highlighted specific factors that directly contributed to the ability of the project to influence public policy. Table five outlines these factors.

TABLE 5 FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO POLICY INFLUENCE

	No. of Reports (n=16)
Involvement of government officials and policymakers in project	2
Relevant and high quality of research and outputs	2
Visibility, reputation and positioning of researchers and/or institutions in policy arenas	4
Novelty of approach or structure used	3
Supportive policy environment	4
Not specified	9

Most of the evaluation reports reviewed for this study do not discuss these factors in detail. To the extent that is possible, we explore these factors below.

Involvement of government officials and policymakers in the project

The WSP evaluation reports⁴¹ emphasized that, among other things, the participation of policymakers in the National Project Groups and associated advisory committees, and working groups made policy influence possible. Not only did their participation ensure that research would remain relevant and inform emerging policy; it also contributed to a sense of local ownership in the rebuilding process and fostered a sense of trust and cooperation previously absent between government officials and civil society stakeholders.

Box 21 Involvement of government officials and policy makers in the project

Not only was it seen as important to make local actors feel that the research process and products was fundamentally “theirs”, but it was also recognized at the outset that indigenously developed policy recommendations were more likely to be acceptable to local/national authorities if they represented “home grown” as opposed to “imported” or externally mandated solutions. This sense of local ownership was strengthened by having government representatives and officials serve as members of the National Project Groups, associated advisory bodies, and/or Working Groups (WSP Model of Conflict Management, p.24)

Relevant and high quality of research and outputs

Two projects indicated that their success in influencing policy processes could be attributed to the relevance and high quality of research outputs. Rigorous and policy relevant research was found to increase senior policymakers’ confidence in the quality of research and the capacity of researchers to produce and supply relevant inputs into policy-making processes. An equally important and related factor contributing to policy

⁴¹ War-torn Societies Project (WSP) Transition Programme–Somali Programme: Internal Evaluation of Activities in Northeast Somalia (Puntland); War-torn Societies Project and Third Party Neutral Models of Conflict Management.

influence is the dissemination research findings in a targeted, user-friendly format that suit the needs of policymakers.

Box 23 Relevant and high quality of research and outputs

TIPS's success ... has been its unwavering commitment to excellence at both ends of the policy research spectrum, namely the quality of its products and its outreach to decision makers. Higher international standards set by its director and board are reflected in peer review of output, not only in an annual forum but revisions of publications targeted at academics and policy-makers. Consequently, senior decision-makers' confidence in the rigour of the work and in the professionalism of the researchers has been growing steadily (External Evaluation of IDRC's TEC Program, p.57)

Visibility, reputation and positioning of researchers and/or institutions in policy arenas

Four of evaluation reports attributed policy influence to the visibility, reputation and/or positioning of researchers and/or research institutions in policy arenas. Reputable and well-positioned researchers and institutions were able to participate more effectively at senior levels of policy-making and ensure that policy research was visible, accessible and given greater attention and priority than may have otherwise been the case.

Box 24 Visibility, reputation and positioning of researchers and/or institutions in policy arenas

... the Consortium achieved a level of visibility that allows it to participate at senior levels in policy debates with public sector officials ... [and] helped establish the foundation for the establishment of CIES [Peru Consortium for Economic and Social Research] (Economic Research Consortium, Peru, p.19)

This project yielded a solid study and policy proposals on income tax reform ... Key recommendations from the first paper were picked up by the Fiscal Pact Preparatory Commission and codified in the Fiscal Pact. This initial influence seems to have been due to the quality of the research and the reputation/positioning of Ana de Molina, the lead researcher, in the Fiscal Pact negotiations. (Fostering Research for Peacebuilding in Guatemala, Central America and Colombia, p.4)

FLACSO Guatemala benefits from a series of linkages with the rest of Central and indeed Latin America in this field. It is not too much to say that it is doubtless the premier study centre on security and defence matters ... And its close connections with FLACSO Chile, an institution also working well and long in this area of study, ensures a special degree of impact and dissemination of products within Latin America (FLACSO Guatemala Security Projects, p.8)

Novelty of the approach / structure used

The WSP and ECAPAPA evaluation reports (n=3) attributed part of their success in influencing policy to the novelty and usefulness of the approach or structure used in the project. In the case of ECAPAPA, the regional approach to policy analysis, dialogue and action significantly enhanced the ability of the project to effectively influence regional policy processes.

The WSP evaluation reports indicated that the participatory methodology used to create a transparent, neutral space to bring stakeholders together, generate policy dialogue and build consensus on future policy directions became the cornerstone of the projects' ability to influence policy processes in Somalia and other WSP countries. The approach contributed to the building of trust among stakeholders and societal confidence in the rebuilding process that was fundamental to generating policy dialogue and producing recommendations for change.

Box 25 Novelty of the approach / structure used

ECAPAPA's unique structure can offer fresh incentives to accelerate change in the region ... ECAPAPA can and does create projects that cut across national and institutional boundaries, mobilizing resources and directing them towards new, high-impact interventions (Mi-Term Evaluation of ECAPAPA, p.20)

... it was WSP methodology that made everyone feel that he is important and has contributed to rebuilding Puntland in some way. This methodology engendered a sense [that everyone] is indispensable, and created what was called "the WSP magnetic field" (WSP Somalia Project, p.8)

People are now talking differently. Even the second session of Puntland parliament is totally different from the first one because of the influence by WSP ... methodology. In its second session, the parliament adopted the slogan 'let us tell the truth' and somehow they did this by producing the first objective and critical assessment of the government's performance (WSP Somalia Project, p.9)

... the sense of ownership over participatory-based research meant that local authorities were, at least in theory, more predisposed to accept policy recommendations that emerged from this process than if they had come from outside or from some externally-mandated process (WSP Model of Conflict Management, p.25)

Supportive policy environment

Four evaluation reports suggested that policy influence was made possible because of the presence of a "supportive policy environment". In the context of these reports, a supportive policy environment included government and other decision-making bodies that are, first and foremost, receptive to policy reform. In the two WSP projects reviewed for this report, for example, the WSP entered the countries at a time when government and other stakeholders were committed to moving forward in the peacebuilding and reconstruction process and implement real policy reform. This commitment included a clearly articulated demand for policy research and dialogue that the WSP, at least in part, was able to address.

Box 22 Supportive policy environment

“The forum created by WSP filled a real need. WSP entered at a point when Mozambican policy-makers, professionals, and intellectuals were ready to move toward greater national conciliation and understanding and helped to contribute to these ends” (WSP Model of Conflict Management, p.11)

Foremost was a clearly articulated demand for policy research. It came from former academics, conversant with their field and eager to apply knowledge and methods to the formulation and implementation of major public policies.” (External Evaluation of IDRC’s TEC Program, p.56)

According to the evaluation reports, a supportive policy environment also included policymakers who are confident in the capacity of the research system to produce research that is relevant to active policy processes.

Overall, a diversity of factors was found to facilitate policy influence in the context of IDRC-supported research. Most of these factors relate to the structure, approach and performance of projects themselves. However, the evaluation reports demonstrate that the ability of a project to influence policy is also shaped by the political, economic and social context in which a project is situated. Nine of the evaluation reports did not make reference to factors that contributed to policy influence.

8. FACTORS INHIBITING POLICY INFLUENCE

Five of the evaluation reports reviewed for this study also identify factors that hindered the ability of projects to influence policy. As in the previous section, many of these factors are project-related while others are the result of the broader policy environment in which a project is placed. Table six outlines these factors as documented in evaluation reports.

TABLE 6 FACTORS INHIBITING POLICY INFLUENCE

	No. of reports (n=16)
Poor relevance, and therefore usefulness, of research to current policy processes	1
Poorly targeted and structured activities	2
Delays in project	1
Resistance of powerful interest groups to policy reforms	1
Deteriorating or lack of supportive policy environment and weak governance structures	4
Policy-making processes are slow, complex, and political in nature	2
Not specified	11

Poor relevance, and therefore usefulness, of research in current policy processes

The Peru Economic Research Consortium evaluation report found that among some of its projects the relevance of research was called into question by policymakers. That research being produced did not address critical policy processes of the day significantly undermined its “capacity to convince” policymakers and influence policy.

Box 26 Poor relevance, and therefore usefulness, of research in current policy processes

Some [research users] questioned the relevance of the research. They considered that the research agenda did not focus on those issues for which the decision makers required answers, especially during the critical process of economic stabilization and structural reforms (Economic Research Consortium, Peru, p.28)

The evaluation report suggested that among a number of Consortium projects the lack of relevant research was the result of insufficient interaction between researchers and policymakers at the design stage of research and throughout the lifecycle of the projects.

Poorly targeted and structured project activities

Two project evaluations reported that poor targeting and structuring of project activities such as workshops failed to attract the participation of policymakers⁴². Poor attendance and participation of policymakers in such activities severely undermined the sharing of research results and the exchange of ideas and experience between policy-interested stakeholders and the overall ability of a project to influence policymakers and policy-making processes.

Box 27 Poorly targeted and structured activities

The country studies were presented at a series of five-day workshops, which aimed to draw in policymakers, the private sector, NGOs, and other representatives of civil society. The workshops ... seem unlikely to have had a significant impact outside the research community for several reasons. First, they seem to have been much too long. A workshop lasting five days is unlikely to attract senior officials or business people (External Evaluation of IDRC's TEC Program, p.23)

The format of the Annual Conferences can be criticized for the show-and-tell approach that was used, in which a range of research topics were covered. Research users who attend tend to be passive participants, and the amount of learning which takes place is probably limited (Economic Research Consortium, Peru p.32).

⁴² Economic Research Consortium, Peru (Phase II): End of Project Report; Trade Employment and Competitiveness: Report of an External Evaluation.

Project delays

The FLACSO Guatemala Security Project evaluation noted that delays in producing the project's principle research output (10 booklets on important security and defence issues) might severely undermine the policy influence of the project. The booklets were intended to inform national debate processes on the future policy of Guatemala in defence and security fields. At the time the evaluation report was drafted the booklets had not yet been printed and disseminated to key stakeholders in the policy debate. However, the evaluators are hopeful that the booklets will be distributed before the debate commences. This demonstrates the absolute importance of effective and timely dissemination of research to influence active policy processes.

Box 28 Project delays

The second project was to join with a UNDP effort using discussions of key issues in this field to produce and disseminate 10 booklets on important security and defence themes ... There have been significant delays in the production of the results of both projects. This is especially serious because the debate is currently being launched on the future policy of Guatemala in the defence and security field with a White Paper on Defence being one of the major results in a matter of a short time frame of five or six months. This is especially important at the present time ... in terms of the anchoring of democracy and the establishment of proper civilian control over the military. ... These booklets should ... form the basis for the national debate on security and defence already underway ... (FLACSO Guatemala Security Projects, p.3)

The booklets have not been produced, and have thus obviously not been distributed. They have of course also not directly had any political influence as yet (FLACSO Guatemala Security Projects, p.5).

Resistance of powerful interest groups to policy reforms

One of the evaluation reports reviewed argued that policy influence was undermined by the resistance of powerful elites to policy reforms and "strategic disagreements among popular groups"⁴³. Such resistance to change reportedly resulted in delays in the policy reform process and limited the ability of the project to influence policy.

Box 29 Resistance of powerful interest groups to policy reforms

... policy dialogue in the agrarian sector has been much less agile than in the education sector due to the weakness of the Ministry of Agriculture, the (related) historical resistance of the landed elites to reforms, and strategic disagreements among popular groups. These tendencies caused major delays in the negotiation of agreements in the Mixed Commission on Land (COPART), the forum in which CNPT has represented indigenous and peasant interests vis-à-vis the government on "structural" land issues. As a result negotiations on the creation of an agrarian jurisdiction have been postponed at least until 2002 (Fostering Research for Peacebuilding in Guatemala, Central America and Colombia, p.6).

⁴³ Fostering Research for Peacebuilding in Guatemala, Central America and Colombia: A Review of the IDRC Record, 1998-2001.

Deteriorating or lack of supportive policy environment and weak governance

Just as instability and transition in a country or region may create new opportunities for IDRC-supported research to influence policy, it may also undermine policy influence potential. A deteriorating or lack of supportive policy environment and/or weak governance was a factor that hindered the ability of projects to influence policy in four evaluation reports reviewed. In Guatemala, for example, there had been a progressive government in place that was dedicated to reform; however recent changes in government leadership severely weakened the state's commitment to policy change⁴⁴. As a result, project leaders had a less captive audience of senior policymakers with whom to work.

Similarly in parts of Africa and elsewhere, the TEC evaluation found that weak government institutions are likely to undermine the efficacy of even the most rigorous and relevant policy research. Unlike many of the other factors hindering policy influence, this reality is outside the control and mandate of IDRC-supported projects. Further, it demonstrates the critical importance of "context" (be it social, political, or economic) in shaping the extent and type of policy influence that projects achieve in countries and regions of the South.

Box 30 Deteriorating or lack of supportive policy environment and weak governance

On top of well-grounded scepticism concerning the intent, utility and feasibility of government's economic policies is the absence of cohesion in the decision-making process itself. The machinery of government in Nigeria and many other African states has eroded badly because of conflict and economic decline. A key question is whether major imperfections in such processes have fatally compromised – at least for the moment – the efficacy of policy research, however well executed and communicated it may ... (External Evaluation of IDRC's TEC Program, p.53)

The issues related to security and defence are central to the anchoring of democracy in Guatemala and are the subject of considerable levels of fear at the moment among those working for a stable and effective democratic system. In this country, where political interest in defence has been no greater than academic, the lack of a defence policy generated by civil society and government has meant that the military themselves have virtually always developed it by themselves. ... Yet little has changed. Neither the government nor the opposition parties seem very concerned about security issues. ... virtually no political figures appeared at the 'mesas' ... There was no political participation in the working group sessions where knowledge generation was actually taking place. ... It has meant that in light of the seeming desire of the majority Rios Montt-led opposition to delay meaningful reform in the defence sector, FLACSO has had to target individual sympathetic members of Congress for special attention ... (FLACSO Guatemala Security Projects, p.11)

... the implementation of proposed policy reforms hinges on the general governance situation and the will of the relevant policy makers and other actors behind the scenes. In the Guatemalan context, the fiscal pact was not implemented, education reform is held up by the lack of a fiscal pact or a commitment of Congress to increase funding for education, and the law proposals designed by the Land Commission may not be passed in Congress (Fostering Research for Peacebuilding in Guatemala, Central America and Colombia, p.28)

⁴⁴ Evaluation Report For the International Development Research Centre: FLACSO Guatemala Security Projects.

Policy-making processes are slow, complex, and political in nature

Finally, and not unexpectedly, two projects attributed difficulties in influencing policy to the slow, complex and political nature of policy-making processes⁴⁵. As described above, even the most rigorous and relevant policy research is not guaranteed to influence policy processes or achieve policy impact and when it does it is rarely immediate. Policy influence is often realized over the longer-term, long after the completion of many IDRC-supported projects.

Box 31 Policy-making processes are slow, complex, and political in nature

What is more striking is that only a few projects have had initial policy impacts in the sense that the policy proposals they generated have been well received by some decision-makers. None have led to legislative or policy changes yet ... Part of the explanation lies in timing: it takes time to conduct research, communicate results to decision-makers, negotiate policy changes with them, and follow-up to ensure that these are actually put into practice (Fostering Research for Peacebuilding in Guatemala, Central America and Colombia, p.11)

Overall, the evaluation reports reviewed for this report do not extensively document the factors that facilitated and inhibited policy influence. However, they do reveal qualitatively some of the potential opportunities and obstacles that research projects confront in their endeavours to influence policy. Eleven evaluation reports did not cite any specific factors that hindered policy influence.

9. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study of selected evaluation reports was undertaken to determine what information could be drawn from evaluation reports regarding the experience of IDRC-supported research in influencing public policy in the countries and regions in which the Centre works. The increasing priority given to policy influence in IDRC programming and projects is reflected in the fact that ninety-four percent of evaluation reports reviewed for this study explore policy influence, in different ways and to varying degrees, as an indicator of project performance. The evaluation reports reviewed tell us a great deal about the intent of IDRC-supported research to influence policy, the approaches and activities used by projects to influence policymakers and policy processes, the extent and way in which projects have influenced public policy or contributed to policy influence, and the factors that facilitated and/or hindered a project's policy influence potential.

The majority of evaluation reports demonstrate that influencing public policy is an intended result or implied expectation of IDRC-supported research. The principal intent of Centre-supported research, according to the evaluation reports reviewed for this study, is to strengthen the mechanisms by which research is translated into policy action. Research and knowledge generation was the most common mechanism through

⁴⁵Fostering Research for Peacebuilding in Guatemala, Central America and Colombia: A Review of the IDRC Record, 1998-2001; Harvesting together: the International Development Research Centre's support for research on agrobiodiversity (results and challenges).

which IDRC-supported projects sought to influence public policy, followed closely by dissemination of research outputs to policy makers and other policy-interested stakeholders and capacity building of researchers, policymakers and civil society actors. Facilitating or improving policy dialogue among policy-interested stakeholders was also an important mechanism to strengthen the linkages between research and policy making and influence policy. These mechanisms were utilized to bridge the gap between research and policy-making and in the long-term, contribute to the development of innovative policy alternatives at various levels. These initiatives were found to be overlapping and mutually reinforcing that together constitutes a process of policy influence.

To bring research to bear on public policy, the evaluation reports indicate that IDRC-supported projects draw on a diverse mixture of activities and approaches. The majority of evaluation reports suggested that the production of policy-relevant research and analysis was the principle activity through which projects sought to influence policy. In more than half of the reports reviewed, the participation of government agencies and individual decision-makers in the project was sought to encourage joint agenda setting and better ensure that research feeds into active policy processes. Dissemination of research results through publications, working papers, newsletters, policy briefs, websites and databases, and government outreach and networking was a common activity in most of the evaluation reports reviewed. Workshops, seminars, conferences, policy roundtables, and other interactive fora were used by IDRC-supported projects as a vehicle for disseminating policy-relevant research results, sharing expertise and experience and facilitating policy dialogue, and building the capacity of researchers and policymakers in ways that bear on public policymaking. Training activities were implemented to strengthen the capacity of researchers to produce policy-relevant research and the capacity of policymakers to absorb and use research results in policy-making. Mentoring and peer review activities were used to encourage peer learning and strengthen collaborative relationships between researchers and research institutions and between research and policy communities. Ideas were also found to enter the policy arena through activities designed to encourage and strengthen dialogue among policy-interested stakeholders. Dialogue initiatives included working groups and task forces to conduct policy analysis and produce recommendations for policy change, and more informal dialogue mechanisms such as policy roundtables to discuss research findings and generate ideas regarding future policy directions, and networking and consultation to exchange project information with and solicit feedback from policymakers.

The majority of evaluation reports reviewed for this study claim that the project under review had influenced policy. Among the evaluation reports reviewed for this study, “policy influence” constitutes what Lindquist (2001) refers to as “intermediate influences” – influences on policy-interested stakeholders and the processes by which research is translated into policy action rather than the actual development and implementation of new policies (*policy impact*). In many cases policy influence was of the kind anticipated at the outset of a given project, although several evaluation reports documented that unanticipated types of policy influence had emerged over a project’s lifespan. Anticipated influences on public policy included contributions to the advance of policy relevant knowledge, significant increases in the capacities of policy-interested stakeholders (researchers, policymakers, civil society), successful dissemination of research outputs to policymakers, strengthened policy dialogue, and contributions to the development of policy alternatives and proposals. Unanticipated or emerging policy influences documented in the evaluation reports included changes in the attitudes and

approaches of policymakers and other policy-relevant stakeholders, the use of research results as inputs into policy development, and researchers advising government and/or taking on important government positions through which they are playing an active role in policy design. These intermediate influences also demonstrate the potential of IDRC-supported research to realize genuine policy impact in Southern regions over the longer-term.

Evaluation reports also revealed useful information regarding the factors that can facilitate and/or inhibit a project's policy influence potential. Factors found to facilitate policy influence included the meaningful involvement of government officials and policymakers in the project, the high quality and relevance of research to active policy processes; the visibility, reputation and positioning of researchers and/or institutions in policy arenas, the novelty of the approach or structure used by the project; and the presence of a supportive policy environment. Factors found to inhibit policy influence included poor relevance and usefulness of research outputs to current policy processes, poorly targeted and structured activities that failed to reach and incorporate policymakers and their ideas into project activities, project delays, resistance of powerful interest groups to policy reforms, a deteriorating or lack of supportive policy environment and/or weak governance structures, and the slow, complex and political nature of policy-making processes. Many of these factors relate to the structure, approach and performance of projects themselves, suggesting that policy influence may be dramatically improved through the sharing of lessons learned. However, the evaluation reports demonstrate that the ability of a project to influence policy is also shaped by the political, economic and social context in which a project is situated. Given that much of IDRC's support is targeted at countries and regions characterized by instability and transition, context must be a key consideration in any analysis of policy influence. Just as instability and transition may create new opportunities for IDRC-supported research to influence policy, it was also found to undermine policy influence potential.

The evaluation reports do not however provide a comprehensive picture of the experience of IDRC-supported research in influencing public policy. Evaluation reports have often-severe gaps in information regarding policy influence activities and outcomes. The lack of detailed discussion and depth of analysis is due in part to the broad nature and focus of many evaluation reports, but may also indicate a lack of clarity and consensus as to what policy influence means in the context of development research (a conceptual framework); the range of ways in which policy influence may be sought and achieved (a methodological framework or guidelines); and what constitutes policy influence and impact as an outcome of research (evaluation guidelines or criteria). IDRC's strategic evaluation of policy influence has the potential to bring greater clarity to these issues through the establishment of conceptual and methodological guidelines for the Centre, its programs, and Centre-supported projects. This can only serve to strengthen the emphasis given to policy influence in project implementation and reporting and the ability of IDRC-supported research to influence policy in a meaningful way in developing countries of the South.

Annex 1 Evaluation Reports Analyzed for Policy Influence

1. Evaluation and Learning System for Acacia (ELSA): Emerging Lessons (Feb. 2001)
2. Economic Research Consortium, Peru (Phase II): End of Project Report (June 30, 2001, *Received May 2001*)
3. Preliminary Evaluation: Community Based Coastal Resources Management Program in the Caribbean (May 2001, *Received May 2001*)
4. War-torn Societies Project (WSP) Transition Programme–Somali Programme: Internal Evaluation of Activities in Northeast Somalia (Puntland) (Feb. 2000, *Received May 2001*)
5. War-torn Societies Project and Third Party Neutral Models of Conflict Management (*Received May 2001*)
6. Trade Employment and Competitiveness: Report of an External Evaluation (March 2001, *Received May 2001*)
7. An Assessment of the State of the Fog-Collecting Project in Chungungo, Chile (*Received October 2001*)
8. Hue University of Agriculture and Forestry Community-Based Upland Natural Resource Management Project: Team Self-Evaluation (June 2001, *Received Jan. 2002*)
9. Community Forest Research Project: Mid-Term Evaluation (*Received Jan. 2002*)
10. Expanding the Horizon: An Evaluation of the Mekong Delta Farming Systems Research and Development Institutes Capacity Development Efforts (*Received Jan. 2002*)
11. Review of Sustainable Use of Biodiversity (SUB) Program Initiative's Use of Local and Indigenous Knowledge in Selected Projects (*Received Feb. 2002*)
12. Harvesting together: the International Development Research Centre's support for research on agrobiodiversity (results and challenges) (Dec. 2001, *Received Feb. 2002*)
13. Fostering Research for Peacebuilding in Guatemala, Central America and Colombia: A Review of the IDRC Record, 1998-2001
14. A Report of the Mid-Term Evaluation of The Eastern and Central Africa Programme for Agricultural Policy Analysis (ECAPAPA) (May 2001)
15. A Report on the Evaluation of Phase II of the African Highlands Initiative (Oct. 2000)
16. Evaluation Report for the International Development Research Centre: FLACSO Guatemala Security Projects (Dec. 2001)

Annex 2 References

- Carden, F. et al. 2001. IDRC-supported research in the public policy process: A strategic evaluation of the influence of research on public policy. Evaluation Unit Draft paper. IDRC Canada.
- Lindquist, E.A. 2001. Discerning Policy Influence: Framework for a Strategic Evaluation of IDRC-Supported Research. University of Victoria, School of Public Administration. Unpublished manuscript.